

THE MOTOR BOYS



THE MOTOR BOYS
in
STRANGE WATERS

CLARENCE YOUNG

Thomas A. C.

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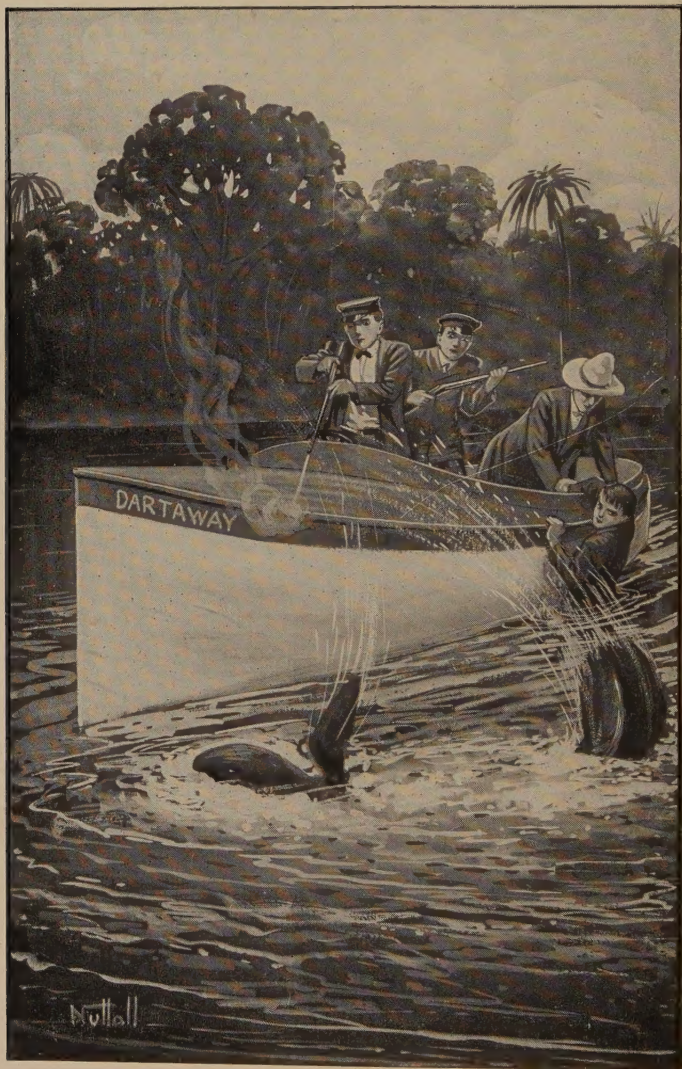
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THE CREATURE WAS LASHING ABOUT IN A DEATH STRUGGLE

Page 65

THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS

Or

Lost in a Floating Forest

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF

"THE RACER BOYS SERIES" AND "THE JACK RANGER SERIES."

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

BOOKS BY CLARENCE YOUNG

THE MOTOR BOYS SERIES

(Trade Mark, Reg. U. S. Pat. Of.)

12mo. Illustrated

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THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS

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THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS

CHAPTER I

NODDY'S COCOANUT PLANTATION

"SHUT your eyes," called Bob Baker to his friend Jerry Hopkins, as the two boys sat in the library of Bob's home.

"What for?"

"Never mind. Just shut 'em; that's all."

"No tricks now. I don't want a mouthful of salt, or find that I'm all tangled up in a folding chair."

"No, this is something on my own account. Shut your eyes."

"All right. Here goes."

Jerry accommodatingly closed his eyelids. He opened them almost immediately as he heard a loud thump in the room.

"What was that?" he asked.

"That was yours truly," explained Bob.

"What doing?"

"I threw my Latin grammar and my algebra over there behind the bookcase."

"What in the world did you do that for?"

"Because I don't want to see 'em again until after vacation, and I didn't want to see where they fell for fear I'd be tempted to do some studying to work off my conditions. And I didn't want you to see where they went to for fear you'd tell me. So I just shut my eyes and let 'em go. They're safe, and when they clean house in the fall they'll find 'em. It'll be time enough then to begin studying. Vacation's here! Hurrah for a good time with nothing to do but have fun!"

"That's so; to-day is the last one for school for more than two months," remarked Jerry.

"As if you'd forgotten it!"

"Well, I wasn't thinking of it, though I'm glad we don't have to do any more studying for a while. There'll only be the closing exercises this afternoon and then —"

"Yes, then what?" asked Bob. "What are we going to do with ourselves this vacation?"

"Go somewhere in our motor boat I guess," replied Jerry. "But isn't that a Latin grammar I see sticking out under the edge of the bookcase?" and he pretended to start to pull forth the volume.

"Don't you dare touch it!" cried Bob. "Shut your eyes so you can't see it!"

Jerry, however, dodging Bob's outstretched arms, reached for the book.

"It's a sea story!" he exclaimed. "Looks like a good one, too, from the pictures."

"Give it to me! I was looking all over for that. Guess I must have dislodged it when I threw my school books back there. It is a corking good yarn."

"Well, Chunky," went on Jerry (giving Bob the nickname fastened on him because of his overabundance of flesh), "are the adventures in that anything like those we had last summer down at Harmon Beach?"

"Couldn't touch 'em! Those were 'adventures as were adventures,' as Salt-Water Sam would say," remarked Bob, giving his trousers a nautical hitch in memory of the odd character to which he referred. "I only hope we are as lucky in striking a good time this summer as we were on the Atlantic coast."

"We generally have been pretty fortunate in that respect," said Jerry. "I haven't thought much about it this year. I studied rather hard to win the prize scholarship."

"Yes, and you got it, which is more to the point, Jerry. As for me, the harder I bone away the less I seem to know. I don't want to hear school mentioned again for three months. What do you say to having something to eat?"

"Just had my breakfast. Besides it's most time to go to — Oh, I forgot, you don't want me to mention school. Well, I'll call it the place of learning."

"Nobody will be on time this last day," responded Bob. "I had breakfast myself, but it was an early one, and I can eat again."

"Never saw the time when you couldn't," observed Jerry, taking care to get beyond the reach of Bob's fist.

"Have a glass of milk, Jerry."

"Well, I don't mind that."

"I'm going to have some and a bit of bread and jam," went on Bob, as he disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

He came back presently with what looked like enough for a substantial meal for two hungry boys. Jerry said nothing, as he was familiar with the eating capacity of his chum.

"Here comes Ned!" exclaimed Jerry as he finished his glass of milk. "Better get some more jam, Bob."

"I will," and before Jerry could stop him Bob had hurried off again. He returned with more refreshments just as Ned Slade came in.

"Are you fellows going to school to-day?" asked the newcomer. "It's almost nine o'clock."

"Breakfast is now being served in the dining car!" cried Jerry, imitating the porters on the Pullman coaches. "It's Bob's second attempt," he explained.

"You did your share," retorted Bob. "Have some, Ned?"

"No, thanks. Three meals a day are enough for me," and Ned sat down in a chair to watch Bob eat.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry. "You look excited."

"I met Noddy Nixon, on my way here."

"You don't mean it! So he's back in town again. Did you have a quarrel with him?"

"Not exactly,—but we had a discussion. I can't stand him. He makes me mad every time I meet him, and when I thought of how he and Bill Berry tried to wreck that vessel down on the coast,—though I guess Noddy didn't realize what a game Bill was playing—why I feel as though I wanted to thrash Noddy."

"Don't blame you," said Bob, finishing the

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last of the jam and bread and butter. "What did he have to say?"

"Oh, a lot of things, but principally that he was going down to Florida to take possession of a cocoanut plantation he's purchased, or which he thinks he's bought. I think it's all in his mind."

"Cocoanut plantation!" exclaimed Bob.

"Down in Florida?" inquired Jerry.

"Yes. This is how he happened to mention it," went on Ned. "I was going past him on the street without speaking, though I was so surprised at seeing him that I wanted to ask where he came from. However, he saved me the trouble. He hailed me and, in that sneering way of his, he said he had something that was better than the gold mine in which we own shares. I didn't ask him what it was, but he told me. Said he had bought a cocoanut grove or farm, or whatever they call 'em, and was going to get rich. He said he was going down in a week or so to live on the land and be a wealthy man."

"Do you s'pose he meant it?" asked Bob.

"I'm very fond of cocoanut pie."

"Go ahead," remarked Jerry with a laugh.

"You've got Chunky interested, Ned, as soon as you mention something good to eat."

"I guess Noddy was in earnest all right," went

on Ned. "He insisted on showing me a lot of papers. It appears he bought the land through seeing an advertisement in a magazine. You pay so much down and so much a month, and the advertisement says you can make enough raising cocoanuts to meet all your monthly installments. Noddy said he had secured a big tract down there."

"Where'd he get the money?" asked Bob.

"From his father, I s'pose. Mr. Nixon is rich, and Noddy is the only child. That's what makes him spoiled."

"When's he going down to the land of the everglades?" inquired Jerry.

"He starts in a week."

"In what part of Florida is his cocoanut plantation located?" asked Bob.

"Near Lake Okeechobee."

"I'd like to go to Florida," observed Bob. "It's a nice place to read about. Lovely climate, nothing to do but gather oranges, bananas and cocoanuts, watch the manatees and turtles, lie in the shade and — and —"

"Get eaten up with sand fleas," put in Jerry. "They have 'em down there as big as sparrows."

"I guess if we're going anywhere we'd better be starting for school!" exclaimed Ned. "It's after nine o'clock."

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The three chums left Bob's house and strolled along the street in the direction of the academy they attended. Ned continued his recital of his encounter with Noddy, the town bully who, on more than one occasion, had proved himself the enemy of the three friends.

"Oh, he talked a lot about how rich he was going to be," went on Ned. "He thinks his cocoanut grove is going to put our gold mine in the shade. Says he'll buy us out in a few months. He was so excited that I guess he forgot all about how he acted down at Harmon Beach last summer until I asked him if he calculated to wreck any steamers on the Florida coast. That made him mad and we had quite a discussion. That's what ruffled me up. I left him spouting about what he expected to do with his cocoanuts."

"I guess all the cocoanuts he'll raise wouldn't make enough pies to satisfy Bob's appetite," remarked Jerry. "But we'd better hurry, if we want to get to school before noon."

None of the chums realized what a part Noddy and his cocoanut plantation were to play in their experiences that summer, nor in what an unexpected manner they were to render the bully a service.

CHAPTER II

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS ARRIVES

THE three chums quickened their pace and were soon at the academy, where they were greeted by a number of boy friends.

"Where are you fellows going this vacation? Out west, down to Mexico or the North Pole? Lots of fun — never say die — right side up with care — automobiles — motor boats — flying machines — don't stop — red flag — danger — never mind — go on — whoop!"

"Let up, Andy Rush!" exclaimed Jerry, laughing. "Give us a chance to catch our breath, please," and he looked at a small boy who, in the stress of excitement, (which was the state he was continually in), was trying to talk to the three chums at once.

"But I want to know," insisted Andy.

"We don't know ourselves," replied Bob. "Go get a drink of ice water, Andy. Your windpipe must be hot after all that."

There was a general laugh at the small boy's

expense, and then the pupils went inside. While they are thus off the stage for a brief period opportunity will be afforded to make the reader better acquainted with them.

The three chums, who, because of their long association with each other, and the part an automobile and motor boat had played in their adventures, had come to be known as the "Motor Boys," lived in the town of Cresville, not far from Boston. They were Jerry Hopkins, son of a widow who was well-to-do, Ned Slade, whose father owned a large department store, and Bob Baker, the offspring of a rich banker.

In the first volume of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys," was related how the chums became possessed of motor cycles and how, by taking part in races, they won a large touring car. Their adventures on the motor cycles were more than equalled by those that happened to them when they had their auto, as was told in the second book, "The Motor Boys Overland." They conducted a successful search for a gold mine in Nevada, and aided an old prospector in securing it, though Noddy Nixon and his crony Bill Berry tried to get it away from them. It was on this trip that the boys became acquainted with Pro-

fessor Uriah Snodgrass, a learned man whose hobby was collecting bugs and butterflies.

In recognition of their aid the boys were given shares in the gold mine, which paid well. It was this mine to which Noddy referred when he boasted to Ned of his cocoanut grove.

At the suggestion of Professor Snodgrass the boys decided to take another trip, as described in the third volume of this series, "The Motor Boys in Mexico." In this they discovered a buried ancient city, had fights with the Mexicans, and Bob was kidnapped but escaped.

Deciding to visit their mine on their way back to the United States, the three chums had rather a hard time of it. Their doings and the things that happened to them are told in the fourth book of the series, "The Motor Boys Across the Plains." They rescued a small boy from the hands of a bad gang of men, and this boy proved to be the son of a queer hermit, who lived on the shores of a lake.

The boys reached home safely, and with quite a sum of money to their credit. With part of this they purchased a fine, large motor boat, called the *Dartaway*. In her they had a series of adventures on river and lake, as related in "The Motor Boys

Afloat." They took part in races, won a prize, discovered the mystery of a strange schooner and cleared up the robbery of Mr. Slade's department store.

But more exciting times awaited them. Their next vacation (for all their fun was had during the summers when there was no school) was spent at Harmon Beach, on the Atlantic coast, as recorded by me in "The Motor Boys on the Atlantic." There they made the acquaintance of "Salt-Water Sam," an old sailor and whaler, and with him made a successful chase after a whale and a shark. They also uncovered a plot to change the signals in a lighthouse, so that a steamer might be lured on the rocks, foiling the men, and aiding the aged keeper and his niece Jess.

Noddy Nixon, as the partner of Bill Berry (though Noddy claimed he did not know of the enormity of the offense) had a hand in the lighthouse plot. As soon as it failed Bill Berry disappeared and Noddy was not to be found for some time. Then, as there was no charge against him, Noddy returned to his home. His father would believe nothing wrong concerning him, and the bully was soon as bold as before. Being well supplied with money he had spent some of it in

buying land in Florida, as Ned has already related. Bill Berry did not come back to Cresville, which fact made the three chums rejoice, for they did not wish to see that rascal again.

"Closing exercises this afternoon, which will be short and sweet," observed Bob, as he and his friends came from the academy at noon, "and then to map out a summer campaign."

"Yes, we want to get busy," said Ned. "No use wasting time. You fellows come to my house to-night and we'll look over some maps and plan a cruise. The motor boat is better than ever with the improvements we put on her last fall."

"I'll be there," called Jerry, as he left his two chums. "I've got to go on an errand for my mother now, but I'll be on hand after supper."

"So will I," added Bob. "I may be a little late though, because —"

"Because he has to eat so much supper; eh, Chunky?" and Jerry laughed as he shot that parting shaft.

"I promise to provide a light lunch at ten o'clock if you'll stay that late," called Ned. "So long!"

The afternoon exercises passed off successfully, and with farewells from their teachers the three chums, as well as all the lads in the academy, bade

good-bye to the place of learning and scattered for the long summer vacation. The motor boys, who were all in the same class, walked down the street, arm in arm, as three fine lads as one could wish for,—tall, strong, full of recourse in times of danger, brave and fearless — excellent types of the American Boy.

Let's each think of some plan for a trip," proposed Ned, as they parted to go to their several homes. "We can talk 'em all over to-night."

A few hours later the three chums were at Ned's house. On the library table he had spread out a number of geographies, guide books and maps, and the boys were soon pouring over them. They talked a perfect babble, the only things that could be distinguished now and then being such expressions as:

"How about a trip to Maine?"

"What's the matter with doing the Gulf of Mexico?"

"We could go to Cuba if the weather kept good."

"The Bermudas aren't so very far off."

"Say, we'll never settle anything this way," called Ned after an hour had been spent in fruitless discussion. "I've got a plan."

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"Let each one write on a slip of paper the place he'd like to go to. We'll drop the slips in a hat and one of us, blindfolded, can pull a slip out. We'll go wherever the slip says."

"Suits me," exclaimed Bob, and Jerry nodded assent.

Pencils and paper were provided, and the boys were about to write down their choices when there came a knock on the library door. A moment later the portal opened and Mr. Slade was looking in on the chums.

"A visitor to see you," he announced.

"To see who?" asked Ned.

"All three of you. Let me present Professor Uriah Snodgrass."

"Professor Snodgrass!" exclaimed the three boys in a surprised chorus. "Where did he come from?"

"I just arrived," announced a little man with very large spectacles, as he stepped past Mr. Slade and bowed to the boys. "I reached town this afternoon, and inquired for Mr. Slade's store, as I had some business to transact. He heard my name, and remembered me. He invited me to call this evening, and — here I am."

"Yes, and just in time, too," cried Ned.

"How is that? Have you just captured a rare

specimen of a mosquito or a June bug for me?" and the professor was ready at once to mount his hobby and start off on a scientific discussion.

"Not exactly," answered Ned, "but we are trying to decide where to go in our motor boat for our vacation. Perhaps you can help us out."

"I'm afraid not," the professor replied. "I never took a vacation in my life, and I do not know where would be a good place to spend one. I know where I am going this summer."

"Where?" asked Jerry.

"I am going to Florida, to search for a very rare butterfly. It is pink, with blue and gold wings, and a certain museum has offered me five thousand dollars for a perfect specimen. It is to be found in Florida only, and I am off for the everglades next week."

"That's a lot of money for a butterfly," remarked Ned.

"Yes, but the museum can afford it," went on the scientist. "No other scientific place in the world has this kind of a butterfly and the museum I speak of will be the envy of all the others. But it is not only for the money that would come to me that I would like to get that butterfly."

"If I succeed I hope to get a position with the museum. A sort of commission to travel for

them into all parts of the world after curious bugs and relics. That is my ambition, and that is why I am going to try for this butterfly. It means a great deal to me, as, all my life, I have wanted to be on the staff of some good museum, in order to search for curiosities for it. So you see it is not only the five thousand dollars I am after, though, of course that sum will be very acceptable."

"Do you think you can find the butterfly?" asked Mr. Slade, much interested.

"I hope so," replied Uriah Snodgrass. "As I have said, it is very rare, and very difficult to catch. I have read of a number of specimens being found but they were in poor condition, or discolored, and it is for the rare coloring of this species that it is desired by the museum."

"I hope you are successful," answered Ned's father. "I have often wondered, when looking at the collection of insects in a museum, how they got so many different kinds. Now I understand. It is due to the efforts of such men as you."

Jerry arose from his chair. The light of excitement gleamed in his eyes.

"I have it, fellows," he cried.

"What! Not that rare pink butterfly?" cried the professor, showing great interest.

"No, but a plan. Let's go to Florida in the *Dartaway*. It will be a fine trip. We'll take you with us, Professor. There's lots of room."

For a moment no one spoke. Jerry stood up looking from his chums to the professor, and then to Mr. Slade.

"I would like nothing better than to go with you boys," Mr. Snodgrass answered. "When can you start?"

"To-morrow!" cried Ned. "That's a fine idea, Jerry! That beats drawing papers from a hat. Florida it is! What do you say, Bob?"

"Couldn't be better. I always was fond of oranges and cocoanuts."

"Then we're off for the everglades!" exclaimed Ned, beginning to do a dance around the room. "Can we go, father?"

"Well, I presume it's no use saying no, so I may as well consent," answered Mr. Slade. "But I guess it will take you longer than until to-morrow to get ready."

"We can start next week," put in Jerry. "That will suit the professor."

"Excellent," spoke the scientist, as he began creeping up on an unsuspecting June bug that was crawling on the table.

"That settles it!" remarked Ned. "Now

let's get a geography and lay out a line of march."

"Is my son here?" asked a woman's voice, and the boys looked up to see Jerry's mother and Mrs. Slade standing in the library door.

"Here I am," replied Jerry. "What is it, mother?"

"I was calling in this neighborhood," went on Mrs. Hopkins. "I knew you were here and I thought I'd step in and ask you to take me home."

"Of course I will, mother. We were just planning another cruise."

"You're always doing that," said Mrs. Hopkins with a sigh. "I can't see why you boys don't stay home one vacation."

"We want to see the world," declared Ned. "This time we are going to Florida."

"Florida?" asked Mrs. Hopkins as if surprised.

"Why not, mother?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, I suppose that place is as safe as any. I was just thinking of something," Mrs. Hopkins went on. "I once bought some land in Florida, but after I got the deed I received word that the property was practically worthless and I never did anything about it. I have the old deed home now."

"Where is this land, mother?" asked Jerry.
"I never heard you speak of it."

"No, because I was sorry I lost the money I paid for it. The land is somewhere in the central part of the state I believe. I'll show you the deed when we get home."

"Yes, and if we get to Florida we'll look up this property," went on the widow's son. "Perhaps it has increased in value. This gives us another reason for going to the everglades," and he laughed.

Once more the three boys began scanning the maps and guide books, while Mrs. Hopkins and Mrs. Slade conversed about household matters. A little later Jerry escorted his mother home and she showed him the old deed, of which he took possession.

"Who knows but what it may prove valuable," he said.

"I hope it does," remarked Mrs. Hopkins.
"I would like to get my money back."

Jerry returned to Ned's house, promising his mother to come home again as soon as more details of the proposed trip were settled.

"Don't lose that deed," cautioned Mrs. Hopkins.

Jerry, with a laugh, promised to keep it safely. He found his chums still discussing the best means of getting to the land of the everglades. They little realized what lay before them, nor what was to happen before they reached Cresville again.

CHAPTER III

OFF FOR FLORIDA

AT first the boys had an idea they could go down the Atlantic coast in their motor boat, and so reach the beautiful land for which they were bound. But the professor pointed out the terrors of Cape Hatteras, which is a menace to even big vessels, so the chums decided on another plan. They would ship the boat from Cresville to St. Augustine and travel there themselves by rail. From St. Augustine they could start down the coast, and go up the Indian river.

"Can't we stop there a while?" asked Bob at this point.

"What for?" inquired Jerry.

"Why that's where the best oranges in the world grow," explained Bob, as if that was reason enough. "Indian river oranges are fine!"

"You can stay there," said Jerry. "We'll go on to the everglades."

"I'm not going to stay all alone," remonstrated Bob. "You might wait while a fellow gathered

a few oranges, though," and he assumed an injured air.

"The trouble is your idea of a 'few' would mean a boat load," came from Ned. "But I guess we can gather some as we sail along."

"Where do you plan to go from Indian River?" asked Mr. Slade.

"We'll land at Titusville," replied Jerry, running his finger along the map, "and then —"

He was interrupted by a sudden movement on the part of Professor Snodgrass, who had ceased to take part in the conversation, and an instant later the room was in darkness.

"I've got him!" cried the scientist eagerly. "He's in my hand on the table, but I'm tangled up in the gas lamp hose. I must have touched the stop-cock and turned off the light. Don't move, please, any of you. Some one strike a light so I can see to put my prize safely away."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Slade as he ignited one of the gas jets of the chandelier.

"One of the rarest specimens of June bugs," was the professor's answer. "I saw him crawling on the table and I made a grab for him. He was right under the gas hose hanging down from the chandelier to the table lamp, but I didn't think of that. I hope I didn't hurt any one."

"No, you only scared Bob out of his appetite," said Ned.

"No, you didn't!" exclaimed Bob. "I'm as hungry as — I thought you said you were going to give us a lunch, Ned? I'm ready —" Then he stopped, in confusion, for the others burst out into a laugh at him.

"Don't worry, Chunky. You'll get your lunch in time," spoke Ned. "But let's get this trip settled first. Have you ever traveled in Florida, Professor?"

"I caught some of the finest snakes there you ever saw," replied the scientist. "I have been over a considerable part of the state, and I'll be glad to renew my acquaintance with it again."

"Then you can tell us if our plan is a good one," went on Ned, informing Mr. Snodgrass of what the boys proposed to do. From Titusville, Ned explained, they would go by rail, with their boat, to Lake Tohopekaliga, through the canal connecting that body of water with Lake Hatche-nana, across the latter lake, and again by canal to Lake Kissimmee. From there they would go by the Kissimmee river to Lake Okeechobee.

"That will give you plenty of opportunity for testing your motor boat," said the professor. "I think the route is a good one. The lower part of

Lake Okeechobee is wild enough to suit any one, and I may be able to find there the rare butterfly for which I am searching. I will be very glad to go with you, and I'll be ready to start any time you boys fix."

Having given that much attention to the proposed trip, the scientist devoted himself to the June bug, which was struggling to escape from his hand. Mr. Snodgrass produced a small box, with a perforated cover, and in it shut the protesting captive.

That done he jotted down in his note book certain facts about the bug, its size, date of capture and the circumstances under which the catch was made. The professor was nothing if not methodical.

"Then the first thing to be done," observed Ned, when he and his chums had once more gone over the map to see if they had selected the best route, "is to get the boat ready for the trip by rail. I fancy the *Dartaway* doesn't like being shipped on a car. She likes the water too well."

"No help for it," remarked Jerry. "Some day we'll have a big enough boat to sail half way round the world in, and we'll not have to depend on trains."

"I wonder if we'll meet Noddy when we get

to Florida," mused Bob. "Where did he say his cocoanut grove was, Ned?"

"He didn't say, exactly, except that it wasn't far from Lake Okeechobee, and I didn't care enough to ask him. It's somewhere in the lower part, I believe. But I hardly think we'll meet him. Hope we don't, for we always have bad luck as soon as he or Bill Berry turns up."

"I guess Bill will keep out of sight for some time to come," remarked Mr. Slade, who was listening to the talk of the boys. "I understand the United States government is after him for his part in the lighthouse plot, and when Uncle Sam wants a man he generally gets him. So I think Bill will not trouble you this trip. Well, have you settled everything?"

"Pretty nearly," answered Ned. "All except that I'll have to have some money for my share of the expenses."

"I expected that!" exclaimed Mr. Slade with a laugh. "It takes money, as well as gasoline, to make a motor boat go. Well I don't mind, as long as you boys take care of yourselves and don't get into mischief."

As the parents of the boys were well off there was no difficulty on the score of funds, though, for that matter, the lads' shares in the gold mine were

more than sufficient to pay their way on the various trips they made.

They discussed their plans in detail, now and then appealing to Professor Snodgrass for his opinion, but the scientist was busy looking for a specimen of a black snapping bug which had flown in through a hole in the screen to get at the light, so he paid little attention to what the boys were saying.

"Well, I guess that's all," announced Ned, as he closed the big geography. "We'll start getting the boat crated up to-morrow."

"Is that all?" asked Bob, with rather a blank look.

"Yes, what else is there to discuss?" inquired Ned.

"Chunky would like to discuss that lunch you promised," said Jerry with a laugh. "Eh, Chunky?"

"Well —" began Bob, looking somewhat sheepishly at Mr. Slade.

"Don't mind me," put in that gentleman. "Go ahead with whatever you had planned. The professor and I will go out on the porch. I'll smoke a cigar to drive the mosquitoes over to Mr. Snodgrass so he can catch 'em and sell 'em to a museum," and he laughed.

The boys had their lunch, and, in justice to Bob it must be said that Ned and Jerry ate almost as much as he did. They talked, between bites, of their trip, and indulged in all sorts of conjectures as to what adventures might lie before them. They imagined strange enough ones, but they were as nothing to what really befell them when they got to the land of the everglades.

The little party broke up about midnight, with mutual promises on the part of the chums to meet early the next morning and get the *Dartaway* in shape for the long trip.

They met at the river dock, where their boat was kept, and gave the craft a good overhauling. Some changes had been made in the craft since the trip on the Atlantic coast. The boat was more powerful, and was so arranged that they could sleep on board, for it had a portable awning and side curtains that could completely enclose the craft. Larger bunkers for the stowing away of provisions and water had been put in, the machinery had been overhauled and, save for a few minor changes, the *Dartaway* was ready for a long trip. These changes were made during the next two days, and then the boat was enclosed in a stout cradle. It was put aboard a flat car and, at the

end of the week, had started on the journey to St. Augustine.

As the boys were walking up the street from the depot they met a man with a small gray moustache, who looked sharply at them.

"Excuse me," he said, "but can you tell me where I can find a Mr. Noddy Nixon? I'm a stranger in town, and I want to see him on business."

"We can show you where he lives," replied Jerry, "but he isn't home."

"Where has he gone?" and the man looked surprised at the news.

"He told me he was going to Florida, to look at a cocoanut grove he had purchased," interposed Ned.

"What part, if I may ask?"

"Near Lake Okeechobee."

"That's where we're going," put in Bob, who was rather impetuous.

"Indeed! Are you friends of his?"

"Not exactly," replied Ned, stiffly.

"Then you're not going together?"

"No, he has already started. We're going from St. Augustine in our motor boat," came from Bob.

"Do you expect to see young Nixon there?"

"I don't believe we will," remarked Jerry, wondering at the man's questions.

"If you do I wish you would hand him this paper — no, I think perhaps I had better try and send it through the regular channels," and the man seemed in doubt. "Would you give him a message if you saw him?" he asked.

"We'd be glad to do you a favor," said Ned. "What's it about?"

"Just tell him to come home at once," was the answer, and the man seemed very much in earnest. "It is very important. I can't tell you just what, but say to him that if he does not come voluntarily we will have to —. No, perhaps you had better not say that. It might frighten him, and we don't want to do that. Just tell him to come home to attend to a matter of which he has already received official notice," and the man returned a bundle of papers to his pocket.

"We'll do it," spoke up Ned, "though we're not sure of seeing him."

"I understand. It's only a chance, but I will be glad to take advantage of it, and I will appreciate it very much if you can get that message to him."

The man moved off up the street, leaving the three boys somewhat puzzled.

"I wonder who he was?" asked Bob.

"Don't you know?" inquired Jerry.

"No; who was he?"

"One of the government inspectors of light-houses. I saw him down at Harmon Beach after Noddy and Bill, and the others in the gang, tried to wreck the steamer by showing false lights."

"Then he's after Noddy for his part in that!" exclaimed Ned. "But I thought they weren't going to prosecute Noddy?"

"Maybe they want him for a witness against Bill Berry," suggested Jerry. "At any rate we'll give him the message if we see him. He's to come home to attend to a matter of which he has already received official notice. Probably he's been subpœnaed and has skipped out for fear of arrest. Maybe that's why he said he was going to his cocoanut grove. Say, boys, I'll wager Noddy has gone to Florida to hide!"

"But why doesn't the government attend to its own affairs and not ask us to tell Noddy to come back?" inquired Ned. "That's a queer way of doing business."

"Perhaps they haven't any officials down near

Lake Okeechobee," replied Jerry. "It's rather desolate down there, I guess, and it would be hard work to hunt around for an unknown cocoanut plantation and locate Noddy. Maybe the matter is not of much importance, and that man may think we'll do to deliver the message. Anyway I believe I'm right and that Noddy has fled from Cresville because he's afraid of something in connection with the attempt to wreck the steamer, and his part in the attack on Mr. Hardack, the lighthouse keeper."

"I'd like to see Noddy get his deserts," interposed Bob. "He's done us a lot of mean turns, but, somehow or other he always manages to sneak out of the consequences. If I get a chance I'll scare him with this message. I'll tell him the government detectives are after him with a pack of bloodhounds."

"Better wait until we find him," advised Jerry. "Lake Okeechobee is a big place and there's a slim chance that we will meet Noddy."

"I thought there was something more than a new cocoanut plantation that made him want to hurry out of town," spoke Ned. "I remember now he acted, while he was talking to me, as if he was afraid of some one."

"That was your imagination," said Jerry with a

laugh. "But come on; let's go home and get ready for the trip, and let Noddy's affairs take care of themselves."

The boys packed their belongings, bade their friends good-bye and, on Wednesday of the following week, were ready to start on their trip to the quaint old city of St. Augustine.

"I hope the boat is there, waiting for us," remarked Bob.

"Yes. It wouldn't be much of a joke if it went astray," agreed Jerry.

"All ready?" asked Professor Snodgrass, as he came down to the depot.

"All ready," replied Ned.

The scientist seemed to have suddenly increased in size, for he bulged out on all sides.

"What is it?" asked Jerry, looking in wonder at his learned friend.

"What? Oh, those are specimen boxes I put in my pockets. I had no room for them in my trunks," Mr. Snodgrass answered. "I also have a portable net for capturing insects with. I must lose no opportunities. I may see some valuable insects on my way down."

"Here comes the train!" exclaimed Bob, as a whistle sounded in the distance. "Get your baggage together!"

There was a confused scramble, as there always is at the last minute, no matter what preliminary preparations have been made. The boys and the professor gathered up their grips, for their trunks had been checked. The train rolled into the station. They scrambled up the steps, and got seats together. Just as the train was pulling out of the depot the boys heard some one yelling at them.

“Hold on! Wait a minute! Stop! I want to speak to you!” was the cry.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIANT TURTLE

THE three chums thrust their heads from the windows nearest them.

"It's Andy Rush!" exclaimed Jerry, as he caught sight of the boyish figure running down the station platform. "Wonder what he wants?"

By this time Andy was under the windows on the side of the car where the boys sat. The train had not yet gathered much headway.

"What is it?" asked Ned. "Has anything happened?" for the small chap seemed quite excited.

"I wanted to see you last night — couldn't — had too much to do — got up early this morning — came down here on the run — saw the train moving — yelled — engineer wouldn't stop — say — if you catch any manatees down there — Florida I mean — save me a little one — I want to tame it — will — you — please — can't talk any — more! Out — of — breath!"

By this time Andy was being distanced by the train and his wind was almost expended.

"I'll bring you one!" cried Bob, who was good natured and always ready to accommodate a friend. "I'll bring you one, Andy," and he waved his hand to the excited boy.

"I say, Professor," went on Bob, a little later, "are there any manatees in Florida?"

"There used to be quite a number but I'm afraid they have been mostly killed off. Still there may be a few. Why?"

"A friend of mine wants one and I promised to bring him a little one. If you happen to see any, please let me know."

"I wonder if Bob has any idea of the size of a manatee or sea-cow?" put in Jerry, with a little smile. "How large do they grow, Professor?"

"Well I have seen them weighing nearly a thousand pounds, but I suppose the average is nearer eight hundred."

"There you are, Bob!" exclaimed Ned with a laugh. "You see what you've promised to send to Andy."

"I meant a baby one," and Bob seemed confused.

"I think even a baby manatee will be beyond your abilities to ship up North," Mr. Snodgrass an-

swered. "They are of good size but rather delicate. They have to be transported in tanks of salt water and even the museums have difficulty in getting them and keeping them alive. I'm afraid Andy will have to be content with some other kind of pet."

"I hadn't any idea they were as big as that," murmured Bob. "Never mind, I'll get him something else."

"Try a nice pine snake, about ten feet long, or a copper-head, or a wild loon, or a turtle," suggested Ned. "Andy won't care what you bring, as long as it's a souvenir from Florida. Ship him a chunk of the everglades."

"Well, I guess you make mistakes sometimes, so you needn't be so smart!" exclaimed Bob, a bit sensitive at the fun being poked at him.

"That's all right, Chunky," consoled Jerry. "I see they have a dining car on this train so you needn't go hungry, at all events."

"Is there, really?" asked Bob. "That'll be fine. I always like to eat in a dining car. I wish it was time for dinner."

The journey by train was an uneventful one. In due time the travelers arrived at St. Augustine, and found that their boat had reached there in good condition. They arranged to have the

empty cradle sent to Titusville, where they would again begin to travel by train until they reached Kissimmee City, on the shores of Lake Tohopekaliga.

"Then for a long voyage on water!" exclaimed Ned, as they left the freight house, having seen to the transportation of their boat to the harbor of St. Augustine.

They spent one day in St. Augustine, buying provisions and a supply of gasoline for the *Dartaway*. The boat, too, needed soaking in the water to close the seams which had dried open on the journey overland.

Bright and early one morning the three boys and the professor, having placed all their baggage on board, took possession of the *Dartaway*.

"We're off!" cried Jerry as he gave a long toot to the compressed air whistle. "Now for the manatees, Chunky!"

"Let up on manatees!" pleaded Bob. "Can't you forget 'em?"

"Yes, but think how disappointed Andy will be," and Jerry laughed as he gave the wheel a turn, shoved over the gasoline and sparking levers, while Ned cranked the engine.

There was a sort of sigh from the *Dartaway's* motor, a cough, a wheeze, and then a series of

throbs that told that the engine was in working order. A mass of foam appeared at the stern where the screw was churning the water, and the boat moved out of the harbor of the historic city.

It was a beautiful day and the boys were in excellent spirits over the successful start of their trip. The engine was working to a charm, and the *Dartaway* seemed like a thing alive, so well did she answer to the slightest turn of the steering wheel.

"Isn't this glorious!" exclaimed Jerry, as he sat in the bow. "Can you beat this, fellows?"

"Not in a thousand years!" cried Ned enthusiastically. "Let Noddy Nixon have his coconut groves, but give me a motor boat and a trip to Florida!"

"Wait a minute! Hold on! Stop the boat!" cried the professor suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, slowing down the engine. "Did you lose something?"

The scientist seemed to be struggling to get at something in the bottom of the boat.

"It's a very rare dragon fly," he said as he brought out a butterfly net. "I just saw him floating on a bit of wood. I must have him for my collection. He's worth a hundred dollars!"

The professor made a sudden lunge, thrusting

his long-handled net over the side of the craft. He would have gone overboard had not Ned caught him by the waist and held him.

The net went into the water with a splash, but, despite his undignified position the professor managed to bring it aboard. He looked into it anxiously.

"I got him!" he exclaimed. "A perfect specimen! Oh, boys, this voyage has started most excellently for me!"

"It would have been the other kind of a start if I hadn't caught you," observed Ned.

"Thank you, my dear young friend," spoke the professor, as he carefully dried the dragon fly and placed it in his cyanide bottle to kill it painlessly for preservation. "I appreciate what you did for me, but I would rather fall overboard a dozen times than miss this beautiful specimen."

Jerry started the engine again, and soon the *Dartaway* was cutting through the water at a fast speed. Jerry had asked the advice of some sea captains in St. Augustine and they had told him to keep in the Matanzas river instead of standing out to sea, and, on reaching Matanzas inlet to use that as a means of getting out on the Atlantic. This plan was followed, and at noon they emerged on the ocean, which they greeted with a cheer.

"Here we are again!" cried Ned. "Guess you haven't forgotten us, Old Salt Horse! How's Father Neptune, anyhow? We had some tussles with you last year when Salt-Water Sam was aboard. If he was here he'd sing this song," and Ned, hitching his trousers up in true nautical fashion, delivered himself of this classic which the old sailor used to sing:

"It was on the isle of Nankum,
Near the land of Timbuctoo
That poor old Sam fell overboard one night.
There was a great commotion
In the middle of the ocean
Sure he gave the sharks and whales
A terrible fright."

"Good!" cried Bob. "Give us the second verse."

"There isn't any second verse."

"Oh, well, the third then. I'm not particular," and Bob began to investigate one of the food lockers.

"Here! Keep out of there until dinner time," called Jerry.

"It's dinner time now. Long past noon," remarked Bob.

"Wait until we make that point of land then, and —"

What Jerry was going to say he never finished,

for at that instant the *Dartaway* hit something with a force that threw Ned, who was standing up, off his feet and into the bottom of the craft.

"What's that?" cried Bob.

"Must have hit a rock!" exclaimed Ned.

"Is the boat sinking? If it is let me put a life preserver on my specimen boxes!" begged the professor.

Jerry had instantly shut off the power and was peering over the bow.

"Don't seem to be any rock," he murmured.

"We have deep water here."

Then, to the surprise of all on board, the *Dartaway* began to move through the water at a fast rate.

"Did you turn on the power?" cried Jerry to Ned, who was nearest the engine.

"No! The motor isn't going!"

"But we are!"

The professor looked over the side of the boat. Then, pointing to something in the water just ahead, he said:

"We are being towed by a giant turtle!"

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSOR'S TRICK

THE boys looked to where the scientist pointed. Some large shape could be seen just under the surface of the water, which was being churned into foam by the action of the creature's flippers.

"How did that get hold of us?" asked Bob. "Has it got us in its mouth?"

"The anchor got loose and dangled over the side," explained Jerry as he made a hasty examination. "One of the flukes must have caught under the turtle's shell after we rammed it. Now the creature is carrying us out to sea!"

"Cut the rope!" cried Ned. "He'll swamp us!"

"No! No!" shouted Jerry. "We can't afford to lose our anchor. We'll need it later on."

"But how are we going to get rid of the turtle?" asked Bob. "He'll swamp us if he gets us away out in the rough water."

The situation was indeed a grave one. The turtle, doubtless imagining it had the best of some

enemy, was increasing its speed. With the anchor caught under a forward flipper, where it offered no impediment to swimming, the big creature was towing the *Dartaway* as easily as it might a piece of driftwood.

"Reverse the engine!" suggested Ned.

"I don't want to do that," objected Jerry. "He's pulling so strong that if we start the motor on the reverse we may damage the boat."

"But we've got to do something," put in Bob.

"I have it!" cried Jerry. "I'll shoot the turtle!"

He made his way to the stern of the craft, where in a locker the boys had stowed their guns. Jerry took out his repeating rifle and loaded it. By this time the boat was well out from shore, close to which the craft had been kept because the water was not so rough there.

"What are you going to do?" asked the professor. After his first glimpse of the turtle he had, apparently, taken no further interest in it, but was intently watching the gyrations of a swarm of little gnats that were flying about the boat.

"Going to shoot the turtle," replied Jerry. "We can't get rid of him any other way, and there's no telling where he'll take us."

"But you can't shoot him," said the scientist, steadying himself against the rocking of the boat, which was now among some big rollers.

"Why not?"

"In the first place he is so far down under the water that the bullets would glance off, and never touch him. And, if by some chance they should hit him, his shell is thick enough to make them seem like dried peas."

"I'll aim at his head," proposed Jerry, anxious to use his rifle on the creature.

"I fancy he has his head well drawn back under his protecting shell," Mr. Snodgrass went on.

"Try for a flipper," put in Ned.

"His flippers are mostly only muscle and cartilage," declared the professor. "He wouldn't mind a bullet through them any more than you would if you stuck a pin in the calloused part of the palm of your hand."

"Then what can we do?" asked Jerry, who was beginning to be a little frightened at the prospect before them. The turtle seemed tireless.

"I'll have to try a trick," the scientist announced. "Have you a fishing rod aboard?"

"Several of them," replied Jerry. "But do you think you can catch him on a hook and line?"

"Scarcely. But get the longest pole you have, please. I'll show you something that I think will make Mr. Turtle let go of our anchor."

Wondering what their friend was about to do the boys watched him select a strong line from the supply they had brought along. Next the professor fastened on a large hook, using a strong wire snell.

"Got any meat aboard," was the scientist's next question.

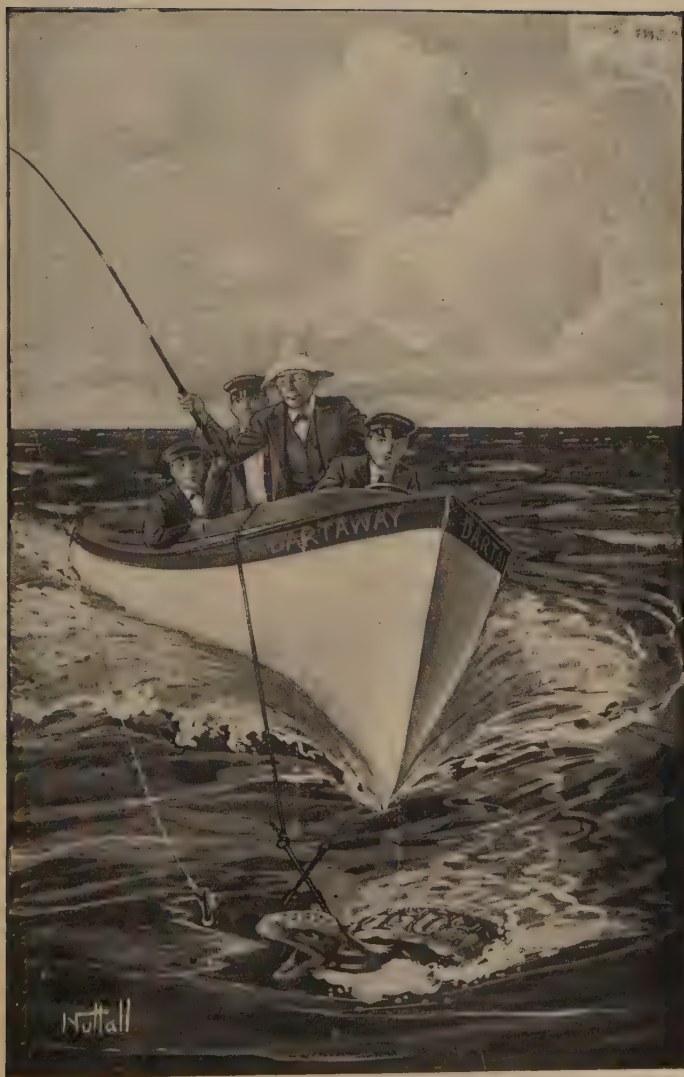
"Some canned stuff," replied Bob, who could be depended on to know what was in the larder.

"That will do. Get me a large firm piece."

Bob opened some corned beef, and soon the professor had baited the hook. Then he took his position in the bow and, with the rod extended at the end of which dangled the line, hook and meat, he prepared to put his trick into operation.

Fortunately the rope to which the anchor was attached had caught on a cleat after paying out a little as the turtle fouled the fluke. This permitted the creature to go but a short distance ahead of the *Dartaway* which it was towing. Otherwise the scientist might have been unable to do as he did.

While the boys watched him Uriah Snodgrass lowered the bait into the water, just ahead of the



THE TURTLE KEPT TURNING TO REACH THE MEAT

little ripples that indicated where the turtle's head was located.

"He's surely going to try to catch the turtle," said Bob in a low voice. "I hope he does. I've heard that turtle soup and steaks are fine eating."

"Can't you let up on eating at a time like this?" demanded Jerry in a sharp whisper.

The professor was leaning forward in an expectant attitude. It did look as though he hoped to catch the turtle as one angles after a wary fish. To a certain extent, that was what happened. The big creature saw the bait dangling in front of it. The rush of the water through which it was gliding swept the meat nearer. It liked the smell of the canned corned beef, though probably it was a new item on the turtle's bill of fare. At any rate the matter of towing that troublesome object, which persisted in following it need not interfere with a meal. The turtle decided to take the meat.

Just as it was about to grasp the bait in the horny beak, strong enough to shear through a man's foot, the professor, who was on the watch with sharp eyes, moved it ahead a little, and then to one side. The turtle doubtless thought the thing was alive and this made it all the more anxious to get the food. There was a flurry of the

strong flippers. The turtle turned to one side to follow the tempting morsel.

Cautiously the professor moved the rod and bait until he was holding it over the side of the boat instead of out from the bow. The turtle kept turning to reach the meat which was held just a few inches beyond its nose.

Suddenly there was a rush in the water and the pole bent almost double. The reel sent out a shrill screech.

"I've hooked him!" cried the professor. "He's free from the rope now! Start the engine, Jerry!"

Jerry lost no time in doing this. The chug-chug of the motor was soon heard and the *Dart-away* forged ahead, freed from its deep-sea captor.

"Haul up the anchor!" called the professor to Ned. "We don't want any more happenings like that. Bob, put the wheel around and send us toward shore. It's too rough out here."

The three boys were busy attending to the boat, while the scientist was still holding the tauted line and the bent pole over the side of the craft. An instant later there sounded a sharp snap.

"The line's broken!" cried the professor. "There goes the turtle!"

He pointed ahead to where a flurry in the water indicated the presence of the creature. "Well, I hope he likes his canned beef with hook dressing. At any rate we're well rid of him, though I would liked to have had him for a specimen."

"That was quite a trick," observed Jerry, as he took charge of the steering wheel.

CHAPTER VI

BOB GETS A SCARE

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS wound back on the reel what remained of the line. Then he unjointed the pole.

"Yes," he remarked. "I thought that was about the only way we could make the turtle let go of the rope. I enticed him around to one side, and that, naturally, made the rope drop from under his flipper. We'll have to be more careful after this."

Speeding the motor up, Jerry soon had the boat near shore, and he directed the course along the coast in comparatively quiet water.

They came into a small sheltered bay and, in a little cove where palm trees came down almost to the water's edge, forming an ideal spot to rest, they went ashore.

"I think I'll take a little walk into the interior while you boys get dinner," remarked the professor, taking his butterfly net and the cyanide bottle

which he used for painlessly killing insects he captured.

"Don't get lost," advised Ned.

"If you see any orange groves let me know," called Bob.

The three boys were soon busy setting up their portable stove and preparing a meal, using the canned provisions they had brought along.

"How about fish?" asked Ned. "Looks as though there ought to be some in this cove."

"Try your luck," said Jerry.

Ned got out his tackle and soon was casting in off a small point of land that stuck out into deep water. In a little while he had caught several fine specimens, and they were soon in the frying pan with some strips of bacon.

"Smells just like a restaurant," spoke Bob, taking long breaths.

"It will be better if it tastes like one," observed Jerry, who was superintending the cooking. "I am a little out of practice."

"Wonder why the professor doesn't come back," remarked Ned, when dinner was ready to serve. "I think he must be hungry."

"Probably he is, but he doesn't know it," suggested Bob. "Very likely he's chasing after a red, white and blue ant."

"I'll go after him," volunteered Jerry. "You fellows go on eating. Don't wait for me."

He started off in the direction taken by the professor while Bob, too hungry to stand on ceremony, began to do ample justice to the food. Ned joined him, and they were nearly finished before the scientist and Jerry appeared coming through the grove of palm trees.

"What's Jerry got in his arms?" asked Ned.

"I don't know. The professor is laden down with the same thing, evidently."

"They're oranges!" cried Bob, as he caught sight of the yellow objects. "They've found a grove of orange trees! I wish I'd gone along!"

"Here are some of the specimens the professor captured," remarked Jerry with a laugh, and he placed his fruit on the grass.

"Where do they grow?" asked Bob eagerly, beginning to extract the juice from a large orange.

"About half a mile back," Mr. Snodgrass replied. "I met the owner of the grove and he invited me to take as many as I wanted."

After dinner they took up their journey again, and that night slept on the boat, anchored in a little harbor about forty miles further down the coast.

They had an early breakfast and after making some minor adjustments to the engine started off again. The weather continued pleasant, though there was quite a swell on, and riding in the boat was not as comfortable as it had been the previous day.

"We'll reach Mosquito Inlet about noon," announced Jerry looking at the map in the guide book.

"Very good," said the professor.

"I'd say it was very bad," put in Ned, making a wry face. "I'm not very fond of mosquitoes."

"I need a few more specimens to complete my collection," the scientist added.

"What is Mosquito Inlet?" asked Bob.

"It's an entrance from the ocean to what is called Hillsborough river," replied Jerry. "It's really a part of the sea, but the book says it's a fine route for boats, and we'll take it. From there, by means of the Haulover Canal, we can get right into Indian river and reach Titusville."

"Then let's do it by all means," suggested Bob. "This motion is a little too much for me."

In fact the rolling and pitching of the *Dart-away* under the influence of the ocean swell, was not very agreeable, and all the travelers were glad

when they reached the inlet and speeded through it to the quiet waters of Hillsborough River.

They ate lunch aboard without stopping, as it was low tide, and not easy to go ashore across the stretch of mud revealed by the receding water. That evening they emerged into Indian River, a beautiful stretch of water about one hundred and fifty miles long, almost as straight as an arrow, and separated from the sea by a narrow strip of land. Its waters are salt like the ocean, and it is affected by the tides.

As dusk settled down the boys found the scene one of much beauty. On their left they could catch occasional glimpses of the masts of ocean vessels sailing close to the coast to avoid the powerful Gulf stream. On their right was a forest of palmetto and other trees, forming a sort of screen for the orange groves beyond.

"It smells just like — just like —" and Bob paused for a comparison.

"Just like a wedding party," finished Jerry as he took in deep breaths of the orange-perfumed air.

The river was widening as they advanced, and the air was filled with flocks of ducks and geese returning from their feeding grounds.

"I'm going to try for some!" exclaimed Bob, preparing to get out his shot gun.

"Better not to-night," advised the professor. "It's getting dark and you couldn't see to pick them up if they fell into the water."

"I'll have some to-morrow," declared Bob. "I'm very fond of roast duck."

It seemed to grow dark suddenly with the quickness that is always noticed in southern countries. Ned, who had taken his place at the steering wheel, looked down at the water and gave a startled cry.

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"It's on fire!" exclaimed Bob, as he glanced over the side.

Indeed it did seem as though the river was ablaze. For a space of a hundred feet or more ahead of the bow, and on either side, there were long lines and streamers of fire, crossed and re-crossed as though some giant lace-making machine was weaving a pattern in colors of glowing, golden yellow.

"A beautiful display of the phosphorescent qualities of this stream," observed the professor. "Very beautiful. It is caused by the fish swimming about," the scientist explained. "They

agitate the water, which possesses suspended in it a quantity of phosphorous and when it is disturbed it seems to glow like fire. I have often read about it, but I have seldom witnessed it. It is almost light enough to see to catch specimens by."

"The guide book speaks of it," said Jerry. "I ought to have known what it was. But I guess we'd better think of camping. We can't go any farther to-night."

Lanterns were lighted, and with the searchlight glowing in the bow, to enable them to select a good place to land, the boat was sent toward shore. All the way there they seemed to be moving through a river of fire.

They found a good landing place, and soon had their camp arranged for the night. It was decided to sleep ashore as it was somewhat crowded on board. Accordingly, mosquito canopies were arranged, and after supper the boys prepared their beds under a shelter tent which was erected.

"I'm going to make me a mattress," said Bob, as, carrying a lantern, he went down to the edge of the river.

"What of; Spanish moss?" asked Ned. "I've read there's lots of that in Florida."

"That would be fine," replied Chunky. "But I don't see any around. No, I'm going to make it of grass."

He proceeded to pull a lot of long bladed herbage from the bank of the river, and soon had himself a soft nest under the shelter of the tent.

"Guess I'll beat you all at sleeping to-night," said Bob, as he stretched out in his clothes on the grass. The others had wrapped themselves up in their blankets.

"Go ahead," murmured Ned. "I'm satisfied with what I've got. I could sleep on a bare plank."

Soon deep breathing told that all the occupants of the camp were far off in slumber-land. It was after midnight when all the others were suddenly aroused by a series of frightened yells from Bob.

"Something's got me! It's got hold of my foot! It's dragging me to the river!" he cried.

Ned and Jerry leaped to their feet. Jerry grabbed his gun which was near him on the ground. The professor snatched down the lantern from a pole in front of the tent and flashed it in Bob's direction.

"It's an alligator!" yelled Ned, pointing to some big black object. "Fire, Jerry!"

Jerry raised his rifle, but, as he did so Bob

pulled his foot away from whatever creature had hold of him and ran toward his companions who had gathered in a group some distance from the tent.

“Shoot it! It tried to eat me up!” he yelled.

Jerry fired point blank, but he evidently missed for the black object, dimly seen in the shadows cast by the lantern seemed to flop away. An instant later a loud splash told that it had entered the river.

CHAPTER VII

KILLING A MANATEE

"WHAT was it?" cried Jerry.

"I don't know," answered Bob, who was almost too frightened to speak. "I was dreaming one of you fellows was pulling me from bed by my foot and I woke up to discover that some animal had me. I looked and saw something black! Then I yelled."

"Let's make an examination," suggested the professor. "Is your foot much hurt?"

"A little," admitted Bob.

But an investigation showed that though his shoe was dented as if by the marks of broad teeth, the leather had not been penetrated, and, on taking off his shoe, Bob found his foot was only bruised.

"There are the tracks of where the beast came from the river," said Jerry, pointing to the unmistakable path of some large animal. It had come up the river bank, straight to the bed Bob had so carefully made.

"Must have been a crocodile," insisted Ned.

"There aren't any in Florida," said the professor. "The alligators are not found in this region, either. Whatever it was Bob, you baited it yourself."

"How?"

"Why, when you pulled that grass you left a long trail of it from the river bank right to the tent. The creature simply followed it up, eating as it went, and when it struck your bunk I suppose it thought it had quite a feast. I guess the taking hold of your foot was only accidental."

"Maybe it was a sort of walking fish," suggested Jerry.

"I have an idea what it was," the professor answered.

"A snake?" asked Bob, and he turned paler than before.

"No, not a snake. I'll tell you in the morning. Better go to bed now. We'll light several more lanterns and I think they will keep away any other creatures."

Bob declared he had had enough of his grass bed, so he got some blankets from the boat and stretched out under the tent between Ned and Jerry, and as far as possible from the river.

"Whatever it was, it's not going to nab me

again," he said, as he fell into an uneasy slumber.

There were no further disturbances that night, and in the morning the boys gazed curiously at the broad path made by Bob's midnight visitor.

"Looks as though it was as big as a cow," said Jerry as he saw the marks.

"Maybe it was," remarked the professor.

"Don't see what cows would be doing in the river," observed Ned, but Mr. Snodgrass only smiled.

"What's the program this morning?" asked Bob after breakfast had been disposed of and the things packed back into the boat. "Where are we going, Jerry?"

"Let's keep right on down this river," suggested Ned. "It's a fine place."

"Not for me!" exclaimed Bob. "At least if we do I'm going to sleep on the boat. No more cows for mine."

"We're going to Titusville," declared Jerry. "Of course it would be nice to voyage down this river, and, according to my guide book it's a beautiful sail. But if we want to get to Lake Okeechobee we'll have to change to rail transportation for a while and embark again on Lake Tohopekaliga."

"I guess that will suit me as well," the profes-

sor announced. "I must soon begin to look for that rare butterfly. It is found in the region of the lakes, and I may be fortunate enough to run across a specimen very soon."

"How are you going to know it when you see it?" asked Ned.

"By its color, for one thing. It is pink, and has blue and gold wings. Then it feeds in a peculiar manner. It spreads its wings out when taking nectar from a flower, and is frequently mistaken for a blossom. I hope I shall find several such butterflies."

"We'll help you look for them," offered Jerry, as he started the boat.

It was but a short run from the head of the Indian river, where the travelers had entered, to Titusville, and, in order to enjoy the unusual scenery, Jerry ran the craft at slow speed. The boys watched the river as it stretched out before them, now narrowing and again widening, while they puffed slowly past groves of palmetto trees that the orange growers depended on as a screen for their groves, which might otherwise be frosted by the cold winds from the Atlantic.

"Can't we go ashore and get some fruit?" asked Bob, when they had traveled some miles.

"I guess the owners would have no objection

if we took some," said the professor. "I understand they always invite visitors to help themselves."

The boys decided to act on this suggestion, and soon the boat was anchored at the shore and the four voyagers went inland until they found an orange grove. They met an overseer who invited them to gather all they could eat.

"These are much better than the others we had," spoke Bob, biting into a luscious fruit.

"He's getting to be quite an expert," declared Jerry.

Once more they boarded the boat and Jerry put it well out toward the middle of the river which was very broad at this point.

"There, I guess I've had all the juice there is in that orange!" exclaimed Bob, as he tossed the mass of skin and pulp overboard. "Hand me another, Ned."

As the orange which Bob threw away struck the water, there was a sudden rush as though some large creature had grabbed the pulp.

"What was that?" cried Bob, as he saw some big object swimming just beneath the surface.

"Made enough fuss for a whale or shark," observed Ned.

"It was after the orange, but I guess it didn't like it, for it didn't eat it."

"Throw another in," suggested the professor. "We'll see what it is."

Jerry tossed some fruit overboard. There was a swirl in the river, and a mass of foam, just ahead of the *Dartaway*. The creature seemed to inspect the floating oranges, and then ignore them.

"Look out!" cried Ned suddenly. "It's coming this way, Jerry!"

Jerry saw something approaching the craft. He whirled the wheel over, and speeded up the engine, just in time to avoid whatever it was.

"That's an ugly beast," remarked Bob. "Mad, I guess, because we didn't give it something it liked to eat."

"Here it comes again!" yelled Ned, and this time the boys saw the creature, just under the surface of the water, approaching the boat on the port side.

"He's going to hit us!" yelled Bob. "Look out, Jerry!"

Jerry gave a glance over his shoulder. He saw the mass of water piled up in front of the on-rushing creature. He increased the speed of the boat, and endeavored to steer it out of the path of the animal, whatever it was. But the creature was

not going to let the boat escape. It changed its course, and, an instant later, the *Dartaway* careened under a violent shock.

There was a splash, as of some heavy object striking the water.

"Bob's overboard!" yelled Ned, throwing his chum a cork ring, attached to a rope. "He's going to ram us again, Jerry!"

There was great confusion on the *Dartaway*. Jerry had reversed the engine, and was looking about to catch sight of Bob, who was floundering around in the water.

"There it comes!" shouted Ned.

Once more the creature was returning to the attack. But this time it did not strike the boat. The reversing of the engine had brought the craft to a stop, and it was beginning to go astern. This caused the creature to shoot just across the bows.

"It's a seal!" yelled Jerry, who caught a passing glimpse of a big brown body just under the water. "Hand me a gun and I'll shoot it!"

By this time Bob had grasped the cork ring, and the professor, who had hold of the rope, was pulling the boy aboard. Ned reached a rifle from the locker and passed it to Jerry, who had shut off the power so he would not have to steer the boat.

"Can you see it?" cried Ned.

"He's coming at us again," replied Jerry.

"Shoot it in the head!" called the professor, not desisting from his work of rescuing Bob.

"You take a gun, Ned!" shouted Jerry. "I may miss!"

Ned secured another weapon, and hurried to the bow to stand beside his chum. Both boys could see where the creature was by reason of the disturbance in the water.

"I see its head!" spoke Ned in a whisper. "It's just like a seal."

He took as careful aim as he could, as also did Jerry. The two rifles were discharged together, and as the bullets struck the water they sent up little jets of spray. Then followed a great commotion, and the river in that vicinity was churned to foam.

"We must have hit him!" yelled Jerry.

"We sure did!" added Ned. "The water is red!"

The crimson color was spreading over the surface. The creature was lashing about evidently in a death struggle.

"Once more!" cried Ned, as he worked the lever of his repeating rifle, and Jerry followed his example. They fired again.

This time they could hear the thud of the bullets as they struck. There was a cessation of the beast's struggles, and the water grew quieter.

"Guess that finished him," observed Jerry, peering forward. "He's done for."

"What was it?" asked Ned.

"Give me a hand here!" called the professor.

"I want to lift Bob in."

The two marksmen turned from their inspection of the thing in the water at the bow of the *Dartaway* to assist in getting their chum aboard.

"Did you think you needed a bath, Chunky?" asked Ned.

"I — I got — one — whether — I needed it — or — or not," spluttered Bob, as he got rid of the water in his eyes, nose, ears and mouth. "Give me a hand."

They helped him into the boat, dripping wet, but otherwise uninjured, as Bob was fat, and floated well, in spite of the handicap of his clothes.

"What was it, a whale?" asked the wet one.

"Did he put a hole in the boat?"

"Guess we're not much damaged," replied Jerry. "But I haven't yet seen what the thing was, unless it's a seal."

"There it is," observed Mr. Snodgrass, as he pointed to a big brown object floating on the wa-

ter. "It's a manatee or sea-cow. I didn't expect to meet with any, as they are almost gone from this part of the world."

"A manatee!" exclaimed Bob, in consternation. "It's a good thing I didn't try to bring one to Andy Rush!"

CHAPTER VIII

A MISFORTUNE

JERRY started the engine, and, at slow speed, put the boat close over to the big creature, which was now quite dead.

"I hadn't any idea they were so large," said Ned.

"As I told you before, they sometimes weigh nearly a thousand pounds," the professor said. "They are harmless, but I suppose this one must be an old one, and a sort of king of this section of the river. Very likely he didn't like our boat to disturb his feeding ground. By the way, Bob, I think he's a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?"

"Yes, that one, or one just like it, tried to bite your foot last night."

"Was that what had hold of my foot?"

"That was the creature," replied the scientist. "I was pretty sure of it before, but I didn't want to say so until I had some proof. I had no idea there were any in this river, and I fancy we shall

see no more. Well, boys, you had quite an experience. Many hunters would give a good deal for the chance of killing a manatee, though I don't see much sport in it myself."

"What are they good for?" asked Jerry.

"Various purposes. I suppose some years ago the Seminole Indians were very glad to eat them. But I don't believe we'll take it along with us. It would be too much trouble. If it was alive a museum might pay a good price for it. But, Bob, I hope you're not in danger of taking cold from your bath."

"Not in the least," replied Chunky with a laugh. "It's so warm in the water that I'd like to stay in all day."

They helped him wring out his clothes and they were hung up to dry, while he donned some spare garments.

"Now for Titusville!" cried Jerry, as he speeded up the motor.

They reached the city about noon, and as they wanted to get the boat ready for another overland journey they decided to have dinner on board before going ashore to make their arrangements.

When they got to the freight office they found that the cradle, in which the *Dartaway* was to be

shipped, had arrived. They engaged men to get the boat from the water, and, having seen it safely put on a flat car for shipment, they bought their tickets for Kissimmee City, where they were again to begin water travel.

Though the railway journey was interesting, and gave the boys glimpses of persons and scenery they were unfamiliar with, they were anxious for it to be over so they might again feel the throb of the *Dartaway's* engine.

Owing to a wreck on the road they missed connections and they had to lay over one night at a small village. The next day travel was slow, and they did not reach Kissimmee City until night-fall.

"I hope our boat's here," said Jerry as he got off the train. "These railroads don't have enough travel to make them as fast as those in the north."

"Maybe it was in the freight wreck that delayed us," suggested Bob.

"There you go, Old Calamity Howler!" exclaimed Ned. "What do you want to go suggesting any such thing as that for?"

"I didn't mean anything," responded Bob, rather surprised at Ned's explosion.

"I was just thinking the same thing myself," Ned went, "and I didn't want my bad presentment to be seconded."

"You fellows are talking nonsense," spoke Jerry. "Come on until we find a hotel. Then I'll inquire about the boat. But where is the professor?"

"He was here a moment ago," replied Ned.

"There he is," said Bob, pointing to the figure of the scientist. Mr. Snodgrass was on his hands and knees on the depot platform, while near him, in the glare of a lamp, stood a small crowd.

"Is he hurt?" asked Bob, in some alarm.

"More likely he's trying to catch a new specimen of a hop-toad," was Jerry's idea.

As the boys approached the professor they saw he had in his hand a small net with which he was endeavoring to capture something.

"Did yo' lose anything, stranger?" asked a tall langy southerner, as he observed the professor. "If yo' did, say the word and we'll all jine in an' help yo' look for it, suah!"

"Thank you," replied the scientist, not looking up from his occupation. "I just saw a very rare specimen of a red flea, and I want to catch it for my collection."

"A flea!" exclaimed the southerner, while the

others in the crowd looked as though they thought the professor had gone crazy.

"Yes, a beautiful red flea, and very rare."

"Excuse me, stranger," went on the man who had first spoken, "no offense, yo' understand, but if yo' want about seven million of them fleas I reckon we can accommodate yo'. I've got a dog that'd give a good bit to git rid of 'em, an' I reckon as how some others I know can supply yo'. Take 'em all, an' welcome, but don't turn 'em loose again in Kissimmee City."

"Thank you," replied the scientist, as though some one had presented him with a large sum of money. "I only require one or two. The kind I seek is not as common as you think. There! I have him," and he made a sudden movement with the tiny net, imprisoning the hopping red captive.

"All kinds of fleas is too common around heah," observed the tall man.

"That's right," chorused his companions.

But the professor was intent only on his captive. He carefully placed it in a bottle and then turned to look for the boys. He had been oblivious to everything, save the red flea, since he had first seen the creature.

The travelers found a hotel and, after arrang-

ing for their rooms, the three boys decided to visit the freight station and inquire about the *Dart-away*.

They found the office deserted, and, after tramping about the platform, and calling out in vain for some one of whom they might make inquiries, they saw, approaching, a little colored boy.

"Wuz yo' uns a-lookin' fer any one?" he asked.

"Where's the freight agent?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, he's over to Buck Johnson's."

"Where's Johnson's?"

"Down the road, about two hoots an' a holler."

"How far is that?" asked Ned, to whom this description of distance was new.

"I doan't rightly know, but ef yo' go twice as fur as yo' kin hoot, an' then as fur as yo' kin holler, yo'll find him, but I don't guess he'll come."

"Why not?"

"'Cause he's at a dorg fight, an' he hates t' come away from a dorg fight."

"Can you tell him we'd like to see him about our boat?" inquired Jerry, holding up a shining quarter.

"Mister, I'd go fo' miles fer two bits," replied the little darky, calling the twenty-five cent piece by its southern name. He seized the money as

though he feared it would vanish, and started off on a run.

Whether "two hoots and a holler" was only a short distance, or whether the freight agent hurried away from the dog fight because of the small negro's description of the three travelers who were so lavish with "two-bit pieces" was not disclosed. At any rate a man was soon seen slouching down the platform.

"Was yo'-uns lookin' fer me?" he asked.

"Are you the freight agent?" inquired Jerry.

"That's what I be. I'm here nights, but Jim Peterson is here day times. We don't do much business nights, an' I jest took an hour or so off — er — fer amusement," he added. "We was havin' a sort of athletic contest. What kin I do fer yo'? Was yo' expectin' some freight?"

Jerry smiled at the man's idea of an athletic contest in conjunction with a dog fight, and answered:

"We're expecting a motor boat, shipped from Titusville."

"A motor boat?"

"It's called the *Dartaway*," added Ned, to help the agent's memory.

"A boat, eh?" and he seemed provokingly

slow. "Well, now, I'm terrible sorry to disappoint yo' gentlemen."

"Hasn't it come?" asked Bob.

"No, an' guess it won't," said the agent in drawling tones. "I got word last night that some boat that was comin' heah was all busted to pieces in a freight wreck!"

"The *Dartaway* smashed!" exclaimed Jerry, and the hearts of all the lads sank at the news of such a misfortune.

CHAPTER IX

NEWS OF NODDY

FOR several seconds no one spoke. The boys stood staring at one another and the agent started to go away, evidently believing he had done his part.

"Can you give us any particulars?" asked Jerry at last, "Where is the boat? Perhaps we can have it fixed."

"It's at Longwood, about ten miles from here," the agent replied, "but there's no trains to-night. Yo'-uns will have to wait until mornin'."

"I'll never sleep a wink," declared Ned. "Think of the *Dartaway* being smashed!" And he gave something like a groan.

"If she is smashed the railroad company will have to pay heavy damages," declared Jerry. "They've spoiled our whole vacation trip! Can't you give us any particulars?" he went on, turning to the agent. "Maybe we could hire a carriage and drive to Longwood. We've got to find out something about our boat."

"Yes, I guess yo' could drive there," the agent replied. "But I wouldn't advise yo' to, after dark. The roads are bad and dangerous. Why can't yo' wait until mornin'?"

"We're too anxious," declared Bob.

"Can't we telegraph?" inquired Ned.

"The telegraph office is closed after supper," announced the agent, and, with their last hope gone, of getting any particulars that night, the boys turned away. They went back to the hotel.

"We'll tell the professor," said Bob. "Maybe he can help us out."

When the scientist was made acquainted with the news he was much surprised.

"That spoils my plan of catching the prize butterfly," he remarked. "I've got to make other arrangements."

"Did you ever have anything lost by a railroad?" asked Jerry.

"Once."

"Was it smashed?"

"Partly."

"What did you do to find it and get it back?"

"Oh, the railroad company was glad enough to assist me," answered the scientist.

"How?" inquired Jerry, and the boys looked interested.

“Why I once shipped a case of very valuable white rats,” Mr. Snodgrass went on. “It was in a wreck, or something, and the railroad lost track of the case; I couldn’t get trace of it. But in a little while I received urgent letters calling on me to take my white rats away. It seems the case had been side tracked after the accident and sent to a lonely station where the agent was a woman. The rats got loose and frightened her almost to death. She wired to headquarters threatening to resign unless the rats were taken away. In that way the claim agent heard —”

But what the professor was going to say he never finished, for, at that moment some kind of a bug came flying into the room through the opened window, and the scientist was after it at once. With his long-handled net in his hand he pursued the insect about the room.

“Now I have it!” Mr. Snodgrass cried as the bug alighted on the upper part of the door. He was bringing his upraised net down to catch it when the portal opened and a colored man entered, bearing a pitcher of ice water. His head came just in the right place and an instant later the professor had brought his net down on the woolly pate of the negro.

The startled colored man dropped the pitcher of

water, which splashed all over himself and the professor, and then the darky let out a yell.

"I'm cotched! He's got me in de net! I'm a gone coon! Leggo! I ain't done nuffin! It were Sam Johnson as done it! Please, good Mr. Man let me go!"

He struggled to get the net off his head, and the professor endeavored to assist him, but their efforts only seemed to make the mosquito-fabric cling the tighter, until the yells of the colored man brought several guests out into the corridor on the run, thinking the hotel might be afire.

"Help 'em, Ned!" called Jerry, who was laughing so he could not go to the aid of the two.

"Help 'em yourself," responded Ned, almost doubled up with mirth at the sight of the struggling figures.

At length the two managed to extricate themselves, and the professor, taking his net from the colored man's head, carefully examined it for possible rents.

"Did I hurt you?" asked the scientist.

"No, I cain't 'zactly say as how 'yo hurted me," the colored man replied with a grin, "but yo' done mos' scaired me t' def!"

"I'm very sorry," went on Mr. Snodgrass. "I was after a bug!"

"I thought yo' were after me!" and the bearer of the ice water gazed at the broken pitcher.

"Well, here's something to buy salve for your head," and the professor gave the man a half dollar.

"Landy! Fo' bits!" exclaimed the delighted negro.

None of the boys slept well that night, on account of thinking about their boat. All hoped against hope that it might not be so badly damaged but what it could be repaired.

They paid an early visit to the railroad office, the professor going with them. Mr. Snodgrass, in spite of his scientific training, knew how to talk business, and he soon had the agent wiring for particulars concerning the motor boat.

"Tell 'em to send it here, no matter how badly it's smashed," put in Jerry.

"Yes, we want our boat," added Bob.

"In a hurry," was Ned's contribution to the general orders.

"My, but yo' folks from the North are in a powerful rush," observed the agent with a smile. "We-uns down here take life easier. I'll do my best for yo'. The night man left word that yo' uns was frettin' an' stewin' about yo' boat. Yo' uns is jest like another feller from the North.

He was here a while ago, an' he were raisin' Hail Columbia 'cause the train was behind time. Said he were goin' to his cocoanut plantation near Lake Okeechobee an' wanted to git there in a hurry."

"Cocoanut plantation?" asked Jerry, a sudden idea coming into his brain.

"Yep; that's what he said. Looked rather young to be ownin' a plantation. He was about the age of yo' lads. Seemed to think a good deal of himself, an' give a powerful lot of orders."

"What was his name?" asked Ned eagerly.

"Let's see, now. It was a curious sort of name. Shaky — no, it wasn't Shaky — Sleepy — no, that ain't it either — Noddy — that's what it was. Noddy Nixon!"

"Noddy Nixon down here!" cried Jerry. "How long ago?"

"He was at this station a week ago to-day," replied the agent. "Had to stay over one night because he missed a train, and he tried to make out it was my fault."

"Just like Noddy," murmured Ned. "So he's down here? Maybe we'll meet him."

"Hope not," remarked Jerry.

"Hark!" exclaimed the agent, as he listened

to the clicking of the telegraph instrument.
“ There’s a message from Longwood. It’s about
you’ boat.”

CHAPTER X

AFLOAT ONCE MORE

How the boys wished they understood the mysterious clicking of dots and dashes that came over the wires, so they might interpret the message which meant so much to them! They watched the agent as he wrote down the words that he evolved from the sounds of the clicking instrument. Then, with what the boys thought was exasperating coolness, he clicked back something in answer, and slowly arose from his chair.

"Good news," he said. "It wasn't your boat that was smashed. It was some rowboats being sent to a steamship company on Lake Okeechobee. Your boat was in the wreck, but was only scratched a bit. It will be here this afternoon."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jerry.

"That's the kind of news we like to hear!" exploded Ned.

"What a relief!" ejaculated Bob.

"Well, yo' uns seem quite pleased," remarked the agent. "Can I do anything else for yo'?"

"You've done more than enough, in locating our boat," said Jerry. "Is it on the way now?"

"The agent at Longwood says they're making up a freight train now to send here. It's due shortly after one o'clock. Queer how things will get mixed up sometimes when there's a wreck. I'm glad it wasn't yo' boat. But yo' Northerners are always in such a hurry! By the way, was that Noddy fellow any relation of yours?"

"We know him," answered Jerry.

"I reckoned yo' uns must have, 'cause he was in the same kind of a rush," the agent explained, as if proud of his discernment.

The boys went back to the hotel for breakfast, which even Bob had forgone in order to get earlier news of the boat. Now, with feelings greatly relieved, they ate the morning meal.

"We might as well arrange for some one to cart the boat to the lake," suggested Jerry as they arose from the table.

"Maybe we's better look for a shop where we can have it repaired," put in Ned. "It may need a lot of attention."

"Hope not," spoke Jerry, though he thought Ned's idea a good one.

They found near the shores of Lake Tohopkaliga a boat builder, who agreed to take charge

of the *Dartaway*, do whatever was necessary and transport it to the water for them. Then there was nothing to do but to wait.

It seemed a long time until noon, and from then until one o'clock, when the freight was due, the boys thought the clocks had all gone on a strike. But at length, as they waited on the depot platform, they heard a shrill whistle.

"There she comes!" cried Ned. "Now to learn the worst."

"Or the best," remarked Jerry, who was of a more hopeful turn of mind.

"I see it!" exclaimed Bob, as the freight train passed them to draw up to the long platform. "Doesn't seem to be in such bad shape!"

The formalities of paying the freight and getting possession of the craft was soon over. The cradle was left at the depot in readiness for their return after cruising about Lake Okeechobee, and the motor boat was taken on a truck to the repair shop.

Carpenters were soon busy on the craft, and, though the boys were anxious to get her into the water they had to wait over another night. This made them rather impatient but it just suited the professor, who found many more forms of insect life than he had anticipated, and he was kept

busy capturing them, much to the astonishment of the citizens of the place, who voted him almost, if not completely, insane.

By the second morning of their stay in Kissimmee City the *Dartaway* was ready to be put into the water.

"Hurrah! She's afloat once more!" cried Ned, as he saw their craft moored at the lake dock.

They waited until noon to allow the seams to soak up, and then, having taken on some fresh provisions, and succeeded in coaxing the professor from his search after a peculiar pink fly he had heard infested the region, they were off.

It did not take them long to traverse Lake Tohopekaliga, which is a small body of water. They caught some fine fish in it, and had dinner on shore. Through an artificial canal they reached Lake Hatchenana, and, crossing that, and again traversing a canal they emerged, late that afternoon, upon Lake Kissimmee, the largest body of water between them and Lake Okeechobee.

"This beats railroad travel," announced Ned, as he sat in the bows, steering. "No dust, no cinders, no smoke, no —"

"No smash-ups!" finished Bob. "We were lucky to get out of it as we did."

"What's the program for to-night?" asked the professor of Jerry, who had, in a measure, assumed charge of the trip.

"There's an island in the middle of this lake," he answered. "I was thinking we might camp on it."

"I'm going to put up a net to prevent the manatees from getting at me," announced Bob with a laugh.

"No danger of them here," spoke the professor. "But I think we'll need a net to keep away the gnats and mosquitoes."

This proved a correct surmise. When they landed on the island in the lake, which piece of land, as far as they could see, was deserted, they were met with a swarm of winged pests that made life miserable.

"This is awful!" exclaimed Bob, slapping about with both hands at the cloud of insects about his head.

"I think I can do something to make it more bearable," Uriah Snodgrass announced, as he began to delve among his possessions. "Here is a chemical preparation, which, if you rub it on

your hands and faces, will, I think, keep the mosquitoes and black flies away."

The boys gladly availed themselves of the stuff, and, after generous applications, they found, that though the insects still hovered about them, they were not bitten.

Preparations for supper were hastily made, and a fire built in the portable stove. A "smudge" was also made, to keep off the most of the mosquitoes and, after this, the travelers were more comfortable.

"It's warm enough to sleep in the open to-night," announced Jerry when the question of erecting the tent was raised. "No use getting it out, and we can start off so much earlier in the morning if we don't have it to bother with."

The other boys were willing, so, after lighting some lanterns, and clearing a place amid a clump of trees, the sleeping blankets were spread out there and the boys turned in.

The professor, as usual, remained up to arrange the specimens he had collected during the day, making entries in his book by the light of a lantern suspended over a butter tub which he used as a table. He was still at this when the boys fell asleep.

Ned was dreaming that he was in swimming and that Bob and Jerry was splashing water on him, when he awoke with a start, to find he was soaking wet. It was pitch dark, and Ned, at first, did not know what to make of it. It seemed as if some one was dashing a pail of water over him as he lay on the ground.

"Here! Let up!" he cried.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, awaking at the same time. Then Bob added his inquiry, and the professor, who had retired at midnight, called to the boys.

"It's raining cats and dogs!" cried Ned, scrambling to his feet. "I'm wet through. The lanterns are drowned out! We should have put up the tent!"

"Raining!" exclaimed Jerry. "I guess it's a cloud-burst from the way I'm getting it!"

It was a drenching downpour, but otherwise the storm was not violent. It had begun to shower gently and from that had rapidly increased to a torrent of water dripping from the clouds.

"Light a lantern somebody!" called Ned. "Let's make for the boat! We can keep dry there!"

"My matches are all wet!" announced Jerry.

"So are mine!" added Bob.

"I have some dry ones!" the scientist called.
"Wait a minute!"

They could hear him moving about in the darkness and rain, seeking for a sheltered place in which to strike a light. Suddenly the blackness was illuminated by a brilliant white glare. It shone full in the faces of the travelers, who, much startled, turned to see what it was. They heard some object strike the island near where their boat was moored, and then the light went out, making the blackness more intense than before.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSEBOAT

"LIGHTNING!" cried Bob.

"Must have struck here!" remarked Ned.

"Did you ever see lightning so near at hand and not hear thunder?" asked Jerry. "It was a searchlight, I think."

"A searchlight in this deserted region?" inquired Ned. "Guess again, Jerry."

No sooner had he spoken than there came the intense white glare again. This time there was no mistaking it. It was the flare of an acetyline gas lantern.

"An automobile!" cried Bob.

"On the lake?" asked Ned. Then suddenly changing the subject; "Wow! I wish I had an umbrella for a few minutes!" He felt a stream of water running down his back.

The white shaft of light played about, now on the trees, now on the water, and again full into the faces of the bewildered travelers, who stood

in the downpour, not knowing what to do. Then, from out of the darkness behind the shaft of illumination were heard the clear tones of a girl's voice calling:

"Well, dad, we've struck land at any rate!"

"It's a boat!" exclaimed Jerry. "Somebody has landed here in a boat!"

"Girls and women in it," added Ned, as sounds of several feminine voices were noted. A moment later a man's tones asked:

"What sort of land have we struck, Rose?"

"Can't tell, dad," was the reply. "It's solid enough at any rate, judging by the way the *Wanderer* hit it. The searchlight doesn't show anything but trees, does it Ponto?"

"No, indeedy," replied a negro. "But, 'scuse me, Miss Rose, I done thought I seed some persons a minute ago when I done flashed de lantern straight ahead."

"Persons, Ponto? Then for mercy sakes, flash it that way again, and perhaps they'll tell us where we are."

Once more the searchlight shone in the faces of the boys and the professor, and this time the girl, who had been speaking to the negro, saw the travelers.

"Can you tell us where we are?" she called, raising her voice to be heard above the roar of the storm.

"On an island in Lake Kissimmee," replied Jerry. "What boat is that?"

"The houseboat *Wanderer*."

"What is it, Rose?" called another girl's voice from somewhere in the darkness back of the lantern.

"Some boys and a man," replied Rose.

"Girls! Girls!" exclaimed the voice of the gentleman aboard the *Wanderer*. "Stop that chattering! If there are persons out in the rain why don't you ask them to come aboard out of the storm? Ponto, run out the gangplank!"

"Yas, sah, right away, sah!"

There was a creaking of ropes and the rumble of a plank being hauled across the deck.

"Excuse me," spoke the one who had been called Rose, addressing the three boys and the professor, "Won't you come aboard out of the wet?"

"Thank you, I believe we will," answered Jerry, and, as the plank which the negro thrust out touched the bank Jerry stepped on it, followed by his chums and Mr. Snodgrass. A moment later they were under the shelter of the

houseboat, standing at the entrance to a snug little cabin, in which were three young ladies and an elderly gentleman.

"Glad to welcome you," said the man. "My name is Nathan Seabury. These are my daughters, Rose, Nellie and Olivia," indicating each one in turn. "We are traveling about on this houseboat. The girls pretend it is for my health, but I strongly suspect it is for their own."

"Now father!" exclaimed Olivia, whom Jerry decided was the prettiest of the three, "you know you're not well, and it's time for your medicine."

"Not until morning, young lady!" and Mr. Seabury winked at the professor.

"Allow me to introduce myself and these boys," spoke Mr. Snodgrass, handing out a card, inscribed with his name and the initials of the various societies to which he belonged. Then he gave the names of the boys, and briefly told of their travels.

"We started from Kissimmee city about two weeks ago," explained Mr. Seabury, "and we have been drifting slowly along ever since, enjoying life here. Last night the small motor, which serves to propel our boat at a moderate speed, broke. We anchored but the rope must have slipped, for the first thing we knew we were

adrift in the storm. Then we hit this place, and — well, here we are.”

“This is an island,” said Jerry. “We camped here for the night, but the storm woke us up and —”

“Why you are all soaking wet!” interrupted Nellie. “You will catch cold. Ponto, light the fire and heat some water. I’ll make some hot lemonade!”

“Nellie is always afraid some one will catch cold,” explained her father.

“Don’t go to any trouble on our account,” said Ned, for which Bob wanted to kick him, as he was wet and hungry, and it looked as if there were good things to eat aboard the *Wanderer*.

The colored man soon had a fire going in the stove, and the kettle was put on to boil, while Nellie busied herself in making not only hot lemonade, but coffee as well, and setting out some things more substantial, at the sight of which Bob’s drooping spirits revived.

“I’m sorry I can’t offer you some dry garments,” said Mr. Seabury with a smile, “but the fact is my boys are all girls. I might help the professor out — but the others —”

"We have plenty of dry things in our boat," said Ned. "I'll go and get them."

The plan was voted a good one. Aided by the searchlight, which was turned to illuminate the path from the houseboat to where the *Dartaway* was moored Ned, borrowing a big raincoat from Mr. Seabury, went to the craft, and, from the waterproof lockers took out dry garments for himself and the others of his party. These he held under the raincoat and brought aboard the *Wanderer*.

The boys and the professor removed their wet clothes and put on dry ones in one of the spare rooms of the houseboat, and then sat down to the meal which Nellie and her sisters, aided by Jeanette, a colored servant, had prepared.

It was still raining hard, and, as the houseboat was large, Mr. Seabury's invitation, that the boys and the professor stay aboard until morning was accepted. The *Dartaway's* bunks had not been made up, and to arrange them in the darkness and rain would have been quite a task. So the travelers were grateful for the unexpected hospitality afforded.

It cleared off in the morning, and when the boys and Mr. Snodgrass arose they looked out on

a scene of beauty. The island lay in the middle of a large blue lake that was fringed all around with big trees, the green foliage of which looked fresh and clean after the shower.

"It's your turn to get breakfast, Bob," observed Jerry. "Skip ashore and start a fire."

"I was just going to ask you to do me the honor to take breakfast with me," put in Mr. Seabury, coming on deck. "I'd be very pleased to have you."

Ned was going to refuse, as he thought the addition of four to the eating accommodations of the *Wanderer* might prove too great a strain, but Mr. Seabury anticipated him.

"I am not altogether unselfish in asking you," he went on. "I am anxious to have you look at our engine. Ponto doesn't seem to be able to find out what the trouble is, though usually he can fix it. So if you'll stay to breakfast and then look at my motor I'll be very much obliged."

"We will!" exclaimed Bob, before any of the others could answer.

"Then I'll go below and see that the girls have things in readiness," said the owner of the houseboat. "We are living unconventionally here," he added. "I find the climate is very good for

my nerves, which are more at fault than my general health."

While breakfast was being prepared the boys looked over the *Wanderer*. They found it a first-class houseboat, with many improvements and conveniences.

"We'll give Bob a chance to fix the motor, he was so anxious to stay," said Ned to Jerry. "I'd like to see him sweating over it."

"You've got to help," stipulated Bob. "You're just as anxious to stay to breakfast as I am, only you're afraid to say so. Come on, there's the bell!"

CHAPTER XII

JERRY IS HURT

BREAKFAST aboard the *Wanderer* was afterward voted by the boys as the best meal they had ever eaten. The three girls who were jolly and full of fun, made the occasion lively with the description of their travels, to which the boys added an account of some of their adventures.

"I wish I was a man!" exclaimed Rose, when Jerry had told of their trip to the buried city in Mexico. "That's what I should like to do."

"Maybe you'll find some ancient ruins where you are going," suggested Ned.

"We's going to Lake Okeechobee," responded Olivia. "I guess we'll find nothing but swamps."

"I believe there is a remnant of several tribes of Seminole Indians there," put in Jerry. "Perhaps you'll discover a prehistoric city."

"Oh, are there really Indians?" asked Nellie. "How perfectly terrible! I'd like to see a little pappoose, but I'd be afraid of a full blooded Indian!"

While the young people talked in this strain Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Seabury were discussing deeper subjects. Mr. Seabury, it developed, was quite wealthy, and had helped to found several scientific schools. He was quite interested in the professor's nature studies, and wanted to know all about the rare butterfly the scientist was seeking.

"I'll keep a lookout for it," promised the owner of the *Wanderer*. "If I see one I'll catch it for you."

"So will I!" exclaimed Rose, who had listened to the ending of the conversation. "I'm fond of animals."

"The — er — butterfly isn't exactly an animal," spoke the professor with a smile. "But I would be very glad if you could catch one for me."

"I suppose you'll get to Lake Okeechobee ahead of us," said Nellie to Jerry. "If you do we may see you there. It's rather a large body of water, according to the map, but I expect you will navigate most of it."

"We plan to make a circuit of it," answered Ned. "We may find some one we know there."

"Who?" asked the girl, but before Ned could state that he referred to Noddy Nixon, Mr. Seabury called out:

"Now would one of you boys mind looking at our engine? I'd like to get under way again."

"There's your chance, Bob!" whispered Ned, but Bob did not have to undertake the job, for Jerry, who had a natural fondness for machinery, was soon tinkering away at the motor. He found that the mechanism which controlled the electric spark was out of order and, though it was no easy matter to adjust, he soon had the machine working better than ever.

Mr. Seabury was very grateful, and pressed the boys and Mr. Snodgrass to spend several days aboard the *Wanderer*. The chums were half-minded to, but the professor was impatient to begin the hunt for the rare butterfly, the haunts of which were farther south, so they prepared to leave their island camp.

The hot sun and wind soon dried out the wetness of the night before, and when everything had been packed aboard the *Dartaway* the boys bade their host and his pretty daughters good-bye. Then, voicing the hope that they would meet again soon, those in the motor boat started down the lake toward the Kissimmée river, while the *Wanderer* followed more slowly.

"They're a nice lot of girls," observed Bob

with a sigh, as a turn of the lake hid the houseboat from sight. "Very nice girls."

"Which one?" asked Jerry with a smile.

"All of 'em!"

"A very fine man!" was the professor's comment on Mr. Seabury. "He has traveled much and has seen many strange insects. A very learned man."

They were now in a fine region, a country higher than the usual low level of Florida, and noted for the variety of its crops. They passed through several large cattle ranges and again through long stretches of dense forests. Now and then they would come to a little colony where fruit growers had settled. At noon they went ashore near a little village and had dinner.

"Boys!" exclaimed the professor, as they prepared to resume their journey, "I've had good news!"

"Did some one tell you where to find that butterfly?" asked Bob.

"No, but a man in the village said there was a curious mound about ten miles below here, a mound erected by a prehistoric race, I believe. I must investigate it. Who knows but I shall find some valuable relics?"

"You mean a heap of dirt such as the Ohio mound builders put up?" asked Ned.

"The same, my boy, only I think this one will be richer in historical treasures. The man said it was seldom visited by any one in this region. He was guiding a hunting party one day and discovered it. Come, we must hurry off. I want to see it before dark."

Once more the *Dartaway* was sent ahead. The river wound in and out in the dense forest, now broadening and again narrowing. Sometimes it was quite shallow and then would come a deep place, in which several varieties of fish could be observed in the clear depths. Bob wanted to catch some for supper, but the professor was anxious to keep on, so no stop was made.

"I think that's the place!" Mr. Snodgrass exclaimed after several hours. "The man said when I saw three big palmetto trees on a little point of land to go ashore and then walk due west. There are the three trees," and he pointed to them.

"Doesn't look like a very inviting region," remarked Jerry as he sent the boat over toward the little point. "But I suppose that makes it all the better for the mound. Well, professor, we'll go ashore and see what we can find."

Mooring the boat to the bank, the boys leaped out, the professor pausing to take several specimen boxes and his butterfly net.

"Guess I'll take my gun," announced Bob, turning back. "I might get a shot at something."

He took his weapon, a combination rifle and shot gun, while the others went on ahead of him.

"Looks as though there was a path here," said Jerry, pointing to a sort of trail through the woods.

"So it does," admitted Mr. Snodgrass. "Well, so much the better for us."

"Unless it has been made by a band of Indians or some ugly negroes," said Jerry in a low tone. "I've read there are some black men who live in the swamps about here, and that they are worse than Indians."

"Better call to Bob to come up front with his gun," spoke Ned.

"No, it might alarm the professor," replied Jerry. "But keep your eyes open."

They followed the path, which wound in and out among the trees. Suddenly the professor, who had made his way to the fore, uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, looking to see that Bob, with his gun, was close by.

"The mound!" cried the scientist, pointing to a large hill to be seen through the masses of moss hanging from the trees.

"It's a mound, sure enough," admitted Jerry. "Let's see what it's like."

As they approached they saw that it was undoubtedly the work of human hands. It was shaped like a pyramid, and on either side stretched level land, covered with a dense growth of forest or underbrush.

"There are steps leading to the top!" cried Bob, who had gone around to the far side of the artificial hill. The others joined him and saw him ascending a rude flight of stairs made of stones set into the side of the mound.

"Better go slow," advised Jerry. "No telling what's up there."

"Let me look for relics!" exclaimed the professor, and he hurried past Bob. "I'm sure there must be lots of them in this place."

Bob stood aside while Jerry, who, as usual, assumed the leadership when there was a hint of danger, took the rifle. Then he started to follow the professor.

Jerry had not taken half a dozen steps when he trod on a loose stone. He nearly fell backward but recovered himself by an effort. In doing so,

however, he leaned too far to one side. The next instant he had fallen and slid to the bottom of the mound.

The hammer of the gun came in contact with a stone or stick, and the weapon was discharged with a loud report. Fortunately the muzzle was pointed upward, and the bullet endangered no one.

"Are you hurt?" cried Ned and Bob, hurrying to Jerry's aid.

They noticed that his face was white and drawn.

"I'm — afraid so," he murmured, clenching his teeth to keep back a murmur of pain.

"Where is it?" asked Ned.

"My leg!"

They noticed that his left leg was doubled under him. As tenderly as they could they lifted him up. As they did so Bob saw a stream of blood trickling from Jerry's foot.

"You're shot!" he cried. "Oh Jerry!"

"No, it isn't the bullet," said Jerry. "I think I ran a sharp stone through my shoe as I fell."

The two chums bent closer to look.

"It's an Indian arrow head!" exclaimed Ned as he saw the long sharp piece of flint piercing the side of Jerry's shoe. "I'll pull it out."

He tried, but it was imbedded in the flesh more firmly than he had thought.

“ Oh! ” exclaimed Jerry, and then the terrible pain, as Ned tried to withdraw the ancient weapon, made him faint.

“ Professor! ” cried Bob. “ Jerry’s hurt! ”

The scientist had disappeared on the top of the mound. Hardly had the echoes of Bob’s voice died away than from the forest surrounding the mound there emerged a band of ugly-looking negroes. They started to run toward the boys just as Mr. Snodgrass, hearing the call of distress, began to descend the stone steps.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SEMINOLE CHIEF

JERRY's faintness however, was of short duration. When Ned ceased trying to exact the stone the terrible pain subsided, for the time being, and Jerry opened his eyes.

"Let the professor take it out," he murmured. "He can do it." Then he caught sight of the advancing negroes. "Where's the gun?" he asked.

Bob had secured it after Jerry's fall, and at this, he raised it in readiness, though he did not point it at the black men. At the sight of it, however, they stopped. One of them, who seemed to be a leader, raised his hand and called out:

"What yo' uns want heah?"

"We came to look at this curious mound," replied the professor, speaking in conciliatory tones. "We were looking for relics. Why? What has happened?" he exclaimed as he saw the blood on Jerry's foot. Evidently he had not heard Bob's cry.

"I ran an Indian arrow head into my foot,"

answered Jerry. "I guess you'll have to get it out, Professor."

"Looks as though we were going to have trouble with these negroes," put in Ned. "We must look out."

"Yo' uns had better make tracks away from heah!" went on the leader of the black men. "We don't like strangers heah!"

"We can't go until I attend to this lad's injury," spoke Mr. Snodgrass firmly. "Lie down Jerry, and I'll get the arrow out. This confirms my suspicions that the mound was built by Indians."

"I'm pretty sure of it, judging from the way my foot feels," said the injured lad.

He was sitting on one of the lower stone steps, and Ned was taking off his shoe and stocking. He had to cut the leather and cloth in order to remove them from around the arrow head which was still sticking firmly into the fleshy part of Jerry's foot. The latter bore the pain bravely, though he had to grit his teeth to keep from yelling as Ned's hands came in contact with the stone, moving it in the tender wound.

"Git away from heah!" ordered the negro leader. "This is our property an' we don't want nobody heah!"

"You'll have to wait until I fix up this lad's foot," insisted the professor.

"We uns ain't goin' to wait."

The negroes had gathered around their leader and seemed as if about to advance on the professor and the three boys. They were an ugly looking lot.

"Look out for trouble," said Ned in a low tone. "I wish we'd brought our guns. Bob, can you shoot straight?"

"Don't do any shooting," advised the scientist. "They are too many for us and it would only make them more savage to fire on them. I must try other measures."

The professor endeavored to argue with the colored men, but they insisted that the travelers must leave the place at once. There were greedy eyes taking in every detail of the dress of the party and the sight of the boys' watch chains excited a cupidity that boded no good. The professor saw that their position was a dangerous one.

"I think we had better get out of here," he said. "Can you walk, Jerry?"

"I'm afraid not."

One look at his foot showed that it would be out of the question. Even with the arrow head

removed it would be a task, and the professor dared not extract the weapon, as, while he was doing so the negroes might rush on them. Probably the worst that would happen would be robbery, but the travelers were in no humor to be despoiled of their possessions.

"We'll have to carry him," said Ned. "You and I can manage it, Mr. Snodgrass. Bob can act as an escort with the gun, and when we are in the boat you can attend to Jerry."

This was voted the only feasible plan. Jerry's foot was not bleeding much, as the arrow in the wound prevented a heavy hemorrhage. Still the lad was weak from the pain.

"Are yo' uns goin' to git out of heah?" demanded the leading negro again, and he advanced menacingly.

"We're glad to get out of the neighborhood where such inhospitable people live," remarked Mr. Snodgrass, as he slung his collecting box over his shoulder by a strap, and prepared to help carry Jerry.

Bob brought up in the rear with the gun, after Ned had gone to the aid of the scientist, and perhaps the sight of the weapon prevented a hostile demonstration on the part of the black men. They followed the travelers for a short distance,

as they went on with the wounded lad along the path that led to where they had left the *Dartaway*.

"I hope they don't give us any more trouble," remarked Bob, as they neared their craft. "If they have boats they may come after us."

"They'd have to have pretty good boats to get ahead of ours," observed Ned.

It was no easy task to transport Jerry along the narrow path, and, several times, the professor and Ned had to rest. But they finally made a turn in the trail that put them on the straight stretch which led directly to the boat.

"There she is!" cried Ned. "Now we're all right!"

As he spoke there was a rustling in the grass along the path. Bob, with ready gun, turned quickly. The boys had a glimpse of several dusky faces peering at them.

"The negroes!" exclaimed Ned. "They're following us!"

"Hurry on!" spoke Bob. "Get into the boat and start up. They'll not come very near as long as we have a gun!"

Even as he spoke the black men seemed to melt away like shadows and the rustling was heard no longer. On they hurried to the *Dartaway*. Jerry was placed on a pile of cushions, and Ned

started the motor. As the boat swung out toward the middle of the river they saw, emerging from the bushes and standing on the shore, half a score of negroes, who shook their fists at the travelers.

"We're well rid of them," murmured the professor, as he prepared to extract the arrow head from Jerry's foot. "But I wish I could have stayed at that mound. It was filled with historical relics and treasures, I'm sure."

With Ned steering the boat, which, after it had gotten well away from the hostile negroes was sent along at slow speed, the professor called to Bob to assist him in affording relief to Jerry. The scientist saw that he would have to cut the weapon from the lad's flesh, as the barbs held it too firmly to allow it being removed in any other way.

"Can you stand some pain?" asked Mr. Snodgrass.

"Go ahead," replied Jerry grimly.

"If I only had some chloroform," went on the scientist, "I could give you a whiff of it, and it would numb your senses a little. But I haven't any. I guess you'll have to stand it, my boy. I'll be as gentle as I can."

The professor carried a small set of surgical instruments with him, for use in dissecting the ani-

mals and insects he collected. He now produced several shining knives, at the sight of which Jerry did not have the most cheerful feelings in the world. But he knew the arrow head must be removed.

Mr. Snodgrass cleansed the knives in some anti-septic liquid he had among his possessions, and then made ready to cut the weapon out.

"Keep the boat as steady as possible," he called to Ned. "Bob, you hold Jerry's foot. It will soon be out."

Jerry had a dim remembrance that he had heard some one say that before. He recalled that it was a dentist. A faint feeling was overcoming him.

Suddenly Ned uttered a cry, and pointed ahead. The professor suspended his surgical preparations and looked up. So did Bob and Jerry. The latter was on the point of fainting.

What they saw was a canoe, containing a solitary figure, crossing the river. As they watched they saw the frail craft upset, and, a moment later the man who was in it was struggling in the water.

"Go to his rescue! Never mind me!" cried Jerry. "I can wait. Save the man!"

At a nod from the professor Ned speeded up the engine and steered the boat toward where the

man had disappeared beneath the surface of the river. In a few seconds the *Dartaway* was at the place.

"Can you see him?" asked Bob.

"Yes, he's right here!" exclaimed Ned, reversing the screw and bringing the motor craft to a stop. "Pass me the boat hook, Bob. He seems to be held down by a tangle of grass or weeds!"

Bob passed the hook forward. Ned lowered it into the water and caught the blunt point in the clothing of the submerged man. With Bob's aid he drew him to the surface.

As the man's head came out of the water he shook it to relieve himself of the water. Then, taking a long breath, which showed that he had held it while deprived of air, he uttered a grunt and proceeded to climb into the *Dartaway*.

"He's a negro!" exclaimed Bob in a whisper.

"Me no black man!" exclaimed the rescued one, shaking himself like a dog and thereby splashing water over all in the boat. "Me Indian. My name Ottiby. Me chief! Ugh!"

"An Indian," murmured Ned.

"He is one of the Seminole tribe," put in the professor. "I recognize the characteristics."

"Paddle catch in long grass," went on Ottiby,

as if in excuse for such a child of nature as an Indian letting water get the best of him. "Me go overboard. Get caught in weeds. No can git loose. Steamboat come along. Boy pull Ottiby out. Good boy. Ottiby no forget. Can get canoe?"

This last seemed to be a question which Ned interpreted as a desire on Ottiby's part to have his boat back again. Accordingly the *Dartaway* was sent ahead again, and the frail craft, which was hollowed from a log, was secured, together with the paddle which had come to the surface.

"Good!" spoke Ottiby with a grunt, when he saw his property secure. "Me no forget white man and boys," and he looked at the travelers.

As he caught sight of the knife in the professor's hand, and saw Jerry's bared foot, with the bloody arrow head sticking in it, the Indian gave a start of surprise.

"Boy hurt?" he asked. Then, without waiting for an answer. "Cut out arrow. Me know. Go ashore. Me get somet'ing stop pain. Ottiby know. Put ashore!"

"Steer the boat to land, Ned," said the professor. "I believe we saved this Indian in the nick of time. He probably knows of some plant that I can use to make it less painful for Jerry while I cut the arrow out."

CHAPTER XIV

CAUGHT IN SAW GRASS

OTTIBY made his way to the stern where he held the rope fastened to his canoe, by which it was being towed. Though he had been near to death he seemed perfectly at his ease now, with no regard of what might have happened if the travelers in the speedy *Dartaway* had not come along. But that he was not ungrateful was shown by his quick thought in the matter of Jerry.

The motor boat was moored in a little cove but, even before it was made fast Ottiby had leaped ashore and disappeared in the woods.

"Looks as if he was running away," said Ned.

"No danger," replied the professor. "He's going for the plant, I believe."

The professor was correct. In about ten minutes Ottiby returned. In his hand he held several long roots. Mr. Snowgrass tried to discover what they were, but the chief knew only the Indian name for them, and they were a species of plant with which the scientist was not familiar.

"Me make foot feel no pain," said Ottiby as he took the roots and rolled them into a compact mass. This he wet in the river and then he pounded the fibers with a wooden club he had picked up in the woods. When he had the roots into a sort of rude plaster he laid it on Jerry's foot, over the wound.

"So like Indians do," Ottiby said. "Wait while then can cut and no feel."

In about five minutes Jerry exclaimed.

"It feels as if my foot was going to sleep."

"Then the stuff is working," remarked Mr. Snodgrass. "We'll wait a while longer and then I'll take the arrow head out. I'm glad we rescued Ottiby."

As a test of the power of the Indian's medicine the professor, after waiting a while longer, stuck a pin in Jerry's foot near the wound.

"I don't feel it a bit," the lad said.

"Then I'll operate," announced Mr. Snodgrass. Jerry closed his eyes as he did not like to see the action of the knife. In a few minutes the scientist announced that it was all over and that the arrow head was out. He showed it to Jerry, and an ugly enough weapon it was.

"I hope it isn't poisonous," remarked Jerry.

"Not much danger of that, I think," said Mr.

Snodgrass. "If there was ever poison on it the stuff has lost its power, for the head must have lain on the ground for a hundred years or more. Now I'd like to have some healing medium with which to bind up the wound. I wonder if Ottiby knows of some herbs I might use."

He inquired of the Indian, explaining as well as he could what was wanted. The chief nodded his head, and once more disappeared in the woods. He was not gone so long this time, and, when he returned he had a bunch of leaves. These he bruised up and bound on Jerry's foot.

"How do you feel?" asked the professor when the rude dressing had been applied.

"It's beginning to pain some, but I can stand it."

"The numbing effect of the roots is wearing off," said the scientist. "It will hurt for a while, I expect, and then perhaps the leaves will make it better."

"Well, we've had a rather strenuous afternoon," remarked Bob, when Jerry had been comfortably propped up with cushions. "Now what's next on the program? Supper I believe."

"You're not going to give anyone else a chance to vote, are you, Chunky?" cried Ned. "Never

mind, I believe you're right. Come on, and we'll get a meal ready."

The old Indian, who had not taken the trouble to remove his wet clothes sat on the stern of the *Dartaway* watching with curious eyes the preparations for the meal.

"Shall we ask him to stay?" inquired Bob of the professor. "He looks hungry."

"Stay? Eat?" inquired the scientist of the Indian, making motions toward the victuals which the boys were laying out.

"Me stay," was the laconic answer.

After the early supper it was decided they should camp where they were for the night, until they saw how Jerry's sore foot was. The bunks were made up and the mosquito canopy spread, as, with the approach of darkness, myriads of these and other insects made life miserable.

Ottiby watched these preparations with wonder in his eyes, but said nothing. It was dusk when he got into his canoe and began to paddle off.

"Me see yo' some more," he promised as he disappeared amid the darkening shadows. "Ottiby no forget."

"He's a queer customer," remarked Bob, as the Indian's boat passed around a bend in the river.

"He's a mighty good one," put in Jerry. "My foot feels fine."

Next morning an examination of the wound showed, to the experienced eyes of the professor, that it was doing well, though it would take a week to heal. They decided to find a comfortable place to camp and go ashore, as there would be more room to move about.

Jerry wanted his companions to continue the voyage but the scientist decided they might get to some place unfavorable to the lad's speedy recovery, and he overruled the proposition.

They went down the river a few miles the next day and found a sort of clearing, near a little cove, which made an ideal place to stop. There they remained about ten days. During that time the professor hunted bugs and butterflies to his heart's content. He was constantly on the lookout for the prize specimen with the blue and gold wings, but saw no trace of it. However, he was not discouraged, as he had not counted on coming across it until he got to Lake Okeechobee.

The leaves which the Indian bound on Jerry's foot proved a wonderful medicine. At the end of ten days the wound was healed, and Jerry could, by using care, walk on his injured foot.

"I guess it's about time to resume our trip," he

remarked one morning, when he found he could get along fairly well. "I'm anxious to get out on the big lake in our boat."

Accordingly camp was struck, and once more the travelers were dropping down the Kissimmee river. They traveled slowly, and about three days later they found themselves on a broad lagoon, which, by the map, they knew opened into Lake Okeechobee.

"Speed her up! We want to reach the lake before night!" exclaimed Jerry to Bob, who was at the wheel. Jerry was still acting the part of an invalid passenger.

"Maybe we'd better keep near shore," remarked the professor. "It looks as if a bad storm was brewing."

During the last hour the sky had become overcast with masses of dull, leaden clouds. The wind too was increasing in power and the waters of the lagoon began to break into waves in the midst of which the *Dartaway* pitched and tossed.

"I think it would be wise to go ashore," said Jerry. "We'd better camp there for the night. We can go out on the lake in the morning."

Bob put the wheel over and they landed at a place where tall green grass came down almost to the water's edge.

"We'll have to hustle to get the tent up if we're going to sleep here to-night," said Ned. "That long grass looks as if there might be snakes in it."

"If there are perhaps I can get a few specimens," spoke Mr. Snodgrass. "But come on, boys. The storm will soon be upon us."

Bob and Ned, aided by the scientist, and by Jerry, who could perform light tasks, soon had the tent up. They securely moored the *Dartaway*, and then set about making things comfortable for the night. The wind was increasing in force, and a few drops of rain fell, but the boys knew their tent was a strong and dry one, and securely put up.

They went to bed early, as it had been a tiresome day. Shortly before midnight they were all awakened by a crash. Then it seemed as if a giant hand had lifted their tent from the ground. An instant later they felt a deluge of rain.

"Secure the tent! Hold it down! Grab the ropes!" yelled Ned.

Bob and the professor sprang to aid him, but they were too late. The tent was blown down.

Out from under the clinging canvas they struggled into the darkness of the storm, for the wind had extinguished their lanterns. They could not see which way to go to get to their boat, where

they knew they would be sheltered, for they had put up the awning before camping out.

"Suddenly Bob uttered a cry.

"Something has cut me!"

"Me too!" cried Jerry. "It feels as if a lot of knives were sawing my hands and face."

"It's the giant saw-grass!" called the professor. "It grows in this region. The wind is whipping the long blades into our faces. Stoop down, boys, or you'll be badly cut!"

They tried to do this, but it seemed as if the saw-grass was all over. In the darkness they had plunged into a patch of the dreaded stuff. The serrated edges of the rush-like growth scarified their skin like knives, and the boys and the professor were soon bleeding from several places.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIG SNAKE

DANGEROUS indeed was the plight of the travelers. In the darkness, and with the storm at its height, they were entangled in the patch of saw-grass, and could not discover which way to escape from it. The wind lashed the keen edges across their hands and faces again and again.

"Stand still!" cried the professor. "The more we move the worse it is! Has any one any matches?"

"I have!" cried Bob, "but I don't believe I can light 'em in this downpour."

"Try," suggested Mr. Snodgrass.

Bob tried, but with no success. Then Ned uttered a cry.

"This way!" he called as a flash of lightning illuminated the scene for a brief instant. "I can see the water!"

The others made their way toward the sound of his voice. Bewildered, however, as they were by the storm and dense blackness which followed the

lightning flash, they rushed but the deeper into the terrible grass.

"Come on!" cried Ned, who, by good fortune had succeeded in reaching an open place near the water, where there was none of the sharp grass. "Move when you see the flashes!"

"Hurry to the boat!" called Mr. Snodgrass. "I hope it hasn't slipped its moorings in the storm."

That was a trick which the tempest had not played on the travelers. They found their craft safe, and were soon aboard and under the stout awning which kept off the fury of the wind and rain. In a moment Ned had found the switch that controlled the small electric lights on the boat, which were worked by a storage battery. Then in the security of the little cabin the four looked at one another.

"This is about the worst yet!" exclaimed Jerry, as he limped over to a stool and sat down. The storm made his wounded foot, which was not quite healed, hurt more than usual. "Your face is a sight, Bob. Looks as if a cat had been at you."

"The same to you and more of it," responded Ned. "I guess we all bear the marks of the saw-grass."

This was so, for the fine keen edges of nature's peculiar weapons had left their record on the hands and faces of all the travelers.

"I think this is where some of the leaves the Indian chief used on Jerry's foot would come in handy," remarked Ned.

"If we only had some," retorted Bob with a groan. "Even some witch hazel wouldn't be so bad, though it smarts at first."

"I have some of the leaves," the professor said. "I observed what kind of a plant they were from and gathered a supply the other day. I will get them."

Removing most of their soaked garments, and wringing out the water, the boys and the scientist were soon busy pounding up the leaves to make a sort of ointment for their scratches. The foliage gave out a sticky salve which, when applied to the cuts made by the grass, soothed them.

"We look like a lot of Seminole Indians with our war paint on," remarked Ned, and indeed the four did present a curious sight, for they were daubed with green stuff in streaks and patches.

"Now for some hot coffee," announced Bob, as he set the gasoline stove going. "That will make us feel as well inside as the leaves do outside."

"Trust Chunky for knowing what's good for the inside," retorted Ned. "However go ahead, Bob. We're all with you."

Warmed and exhilarated by the hot drink the travelers listened with better spirits to the patter of the rain on the awning. They got out some dry garments from the lockers and then, making up the folding bunks with which the *Dartaway* was provided, they spent the rest of the night in comparative comfort.

The storm was over at sunrise, and as the boys peered from the curtained cabin they gazed out on scene of beauty. They were on the shore of a broad lagoon which gave entrance into Lake Okeechobee. Behind them, some distance back, was a dense forest, and, nearer to them was the dreadful saw-grass. Over the stretch of water myriads of birds were flying, while, every now and then, a splash and a shower of glistening drops told that a hungry fish was trying to get an early breakfast.

"How do you boys feel?" asked Mr. Snodgrass.

"Much better," announced Jerry, and the others said the same. The pain from their cuts and scratches was all gone, so quick-acting was the Indian's remedy. After breakfast they went ashore

and got the tent and camp stuff which, though much scattered, had not suffered any material damage.

"No more camping on this shore!" exclaimed Ned as he looked at the waving saw-grass.

"I must get some specimens," the scientist said. "I have read about the peculiar properties of this plant but I never came across it before."

"You want to put gloves on if you try to go in there," cautioned Jerry, and this the professor did. In that way he was able to secure some of the grass for his cabinet of curiosities, which was already assuming large proportions.

"Now for Lake Okeechobee proper!" cried Bob as the boat was once more started off. They were soon out of the lagoon and in due time emerged around a point of land and beheld, stretched out before them the largest lake of Florida, a beautiful sight under the gleaming southern sun.

"Hurrah for the everglades!" cried Ned.

"And Noddy Nixon's cocoanut grove," added Jerry. "I wonder if we'll see him?" He also thought of the deed to the land his mother had bought, and vaguely dwelt on the possibility of locating it.

"Now I must get seriously to work and look for

my rare butterfly," remarked the professor, as he began to rummage among his nets and other insect-catching accessories. "I hope you boys will be on the watch for it, as it means a great deal to me."

They assured him that they would, and then Ned, who was steering, increased the speed of the motor until the boat shot along at a fast rate through the blue waters of the lake.

"Look there!" cried Bob suddenly, pointing just ahead.

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"A big fish leaped half way out of the water. There must be fine sport here. I'm going to try to catch some for dinner, as it's almost noon."

"Go ahead," remarked Ned. "I'll slow down for you."

Bob baited his hook and, in a short time had caught a fine fish. Then Jerry joined him in the sport, and in half an hour they had enough for a meal. They went ashore, and Jerry, who volunteered to act as cook, quickly had the finny specimens frying in bacon fat which browned to a golden hue the corn meal into which the fish were dipped.

There wasn't much left when they cleared away the wooden dishes that they used, and then, after a consultation, it was decided to camp for a few

days at the spot where they had landed. This would give their cuts a chance to heal and by making short excursions here and there they could get acquainted with the character of the lake.

It was on the third day of their camping out on the shore of Lake Okeechobee that, as they were returning in the motor boat one afternoon Jerry, who had taken the wheel, suddenly called out:

“Doesn’t that sound like some one in our camp?”

They were close to where they usually moored the boat, about fifty feet from where the tent was set up.

“Some one is rattling away among the pots and pans,” remarked Ned. “Maybe it’s some of those negroes who have followed us.”

“Or Seminole Indians,” added Bob.

“More likely some animal,” observed the professor.

“Then it had better leave before I take a shot at it,” exclaimed Bob, getting his gun in readiness.

The boat was approaching closer, and the noise amid the camp stuff could be plainly heard. It sounded as though some animal like a cow was nosing among a lot of tin pails after something to eat. Jerry shut off the power and the boat slowly drifted to the shore.

"Let me get at him!" cried Bob.

"Look out! It may be a manatee!" cautioned Ned with a laugh.

But his laugh was stopped short for, an instant later they all beheld something that almost made their hearts stop beating.

They could look into the midst of the camp, and there, in front of the tent, writhing about in a confusion of dishes and food, was an immense snake!

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

"QUICK with that gun, Bob!" cried Jerry. "Now's your chance for a shot!"

Bob raised his weapon and fired, but his nervousness, and the sudden terror into which the sight of the reptile threw him, made his aim unsteady. The bullet cut the branches of a tree four feet above the serpent.

"Let me try!" exclaimed the professor. "I think I can get him."

Bob handed over the gun.

"No, I don't mean with that," and the scientist began making a slip noose with a rope.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jerry.

"I'm going to try to capture that snake alive," answered Mr. Snodgrass. "I recognize it as a valuable specimen of a water reptile, something like the giant boas of the tropics. If I can capture it and ship it up north I will get a good sum from the museum. Steady with the boat and let me get ashore."

"The snake will kill you!" cried Bob.

"No, they are comparatively harmless," remarked the scientist. "The only danger is in being caught in their powerful coils. They are not poisonous."

"Excuse me from that sort of a job," murmured Ned.

By this time the boat had run ashore, the keel grating on the gravel at the edge of the lake. The professor had made a running noose and held it extended in front of him by means of the boat hook.

"I'll try and get close enough to the reptile to slip the noose over his head," he remarked to Jerry. "When I do, send the boat back into the lake and I think we'll have him just where we want him."

"Suppose he tackles you?" asked Bob.

"I'm not afraid. I've handled snakes before," announced Uriah Snodgrass confidently.

He cautiously approached the reptile. The big serpent seemed to be searching in the camp for something to eat. It crawled here and there, poking its ugly head into all the openings visible and overturning several boxes.

"It's a whopper!" cried Ned as a nearer view showed the real size of the reptile.

Meanwhile the professor was approaching closer and closer, holding the dangling noose ready to slip over the serpent's head. Suddenly the creature raised itself so that the scientist thought he had a change. He rushed forward with a cry to the boys to be in readiness. Ned shoved the boat off shore and Jerry stood ready to start the motor, while Bob had secured the end of the rope about a cleat.

All at once the snake caught sight of the man advancing with the rope. It must have been aware of the hostile intentions of the professor for it instantly gave vent to a loud hiss and coiled up ready for action.

"Look out, Mr. Snodgrass!" called Jerry. "He's got an ugly look!"

The professor did not reply. Stepping cautiously he kept on advancing, holding his noose in readiness. It was a brave act but probably only a person who would dare much in the interests of science would have undertaken it.

Suddenly the professor cast his noose. Now either he was not an expert in the use of the lasso, or the snake instinctively knew how to avoid such dangers. At any rate the reptile swayed its head to one side and the rope fell harmlessly to the

ground. The next instant the snake had uncoiled and was wiggling straight for the professor.

"Run!" cried Bob.

"Jump!" advised Jerry.

"Hit him with a club!" was Ned's caution.

The professor did not heed the advice. With a bravery, worthy perhaps of a better cause, he made a spring not away from but right at the snake. He explained afterward that he hoped to grab it around the neck and choke it.

But he missed his aim, and the next moment there was a confused tangle of man and snake on the ground. All the boys could see was a striped tail thrashing about while, every now and then, the professor's legs were visible. He had some sort of a grip, but it was not the right kind, on the reptile.

"We must go ashore and help him! He'll be killed!" shouted Ned.

"Give me the gun, Bob!" yelled Jerry. "I'll try a shot."

"Don't hit the professor," cautioned Bob.

Ned leaped ashore, followed by his companions who waded through the intervening shallow water. They ran toward where the professor was still struggling with the snake. But, by the time

they arrived the battle was over. Or, rather, it was a retreat. The snake, probably the worst scared reptile in Florida at that moment, was headed for the water, and, as the professor was stretched out on his back, where a movement of the strong folds had thrown him the snake glided into the lake and disappeared amid a series of ripples.

"There he goes!" cried Bob, while Jerry sent several bullets from the magazine rifle after it. But it was too late. The snake got away unharmed.

"Too bad I missed him," remarked the professor as he got up and brushed the dirt from his clothes. "It would have been a valuable specimen."

"Lucky it didn't crush you to death," said Jerry. "It was a monster."

"I've seen larger ones," observed Mr. Snodgrass. "I must make a note of this. I will write a scientific paper about it."

Fortunately the travelers had returned to camp before the snake had time to do much damage. Some fresh fish, which the boys depended on for their meal, were eaten, and the place was in confusion from the investigations of the reptile.

"I am glad he didn't take it into his head to

come in the night," remarked Bob. "He'd have scared us all to death."

Matters were soon straightened out, the professor proceeding to note down facts about the reptile as calmly as though he had not been in danger of serious injury, if not death, from the encounter.

"If I could only have gotten hold of him around the neck," he said, "I'd have him a captive now."

"It's just as well," remarked Ned. "He would have been unhandy to cart around, and, if you got your prize butterfly the snake might have eaten him up."

"That's so," admitted the scientist, finding some consolation in this thought.

It was on the afternoon of the next day when, as they were in the boat, making their way along the eastern shore of the lake, that they approached a small settlement.

"Here's civilization," remarked Jerry as he saw the cluster of houses. "I didn't suppose any one lived here."

"Oh, there are several fruit growers in this vicinity," replied the professor, "but after this I guess we'll find the lake lonesome enough for we'll soon be among the everglades."

They went ashore as they needed some supplies and gasoline. While their order was being filled at the village store the boys strolled out a distance into the country.

"We'll be back in a little while, professor," remarked Jerry, as the scientist elected to remain in the store, having caught sight of a curious kind of black bug on the wall.

The village was so small that the boys had soon passed its confines. They walked along a little stream and saw, just ahead of them, two figures. As they approached nearer they could hear persons in dispute.

"Seems to me as if I had heard that one voice somewhere before," remarked Ned.

"It does sound familiar," agreed Jerry.

The person with his back to the boys was saying:

"I tell you this isn't my land. I know what I'm talking about. You're in possession of my cocoanut grove, and I want it! I didn't buy this old swamp!" and the figure turned and pointed to a morass on the edge of which he was standing.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed the other, a man. "I've owned this cocoanut grove for years. You've been swindled, that's what's the matter."



THERE WAS A CONFUSED TANGLE OF MAN AND SNAKE ON THE
GROUND

"I tell you I'm going to have my rights!" retorted the other. Then he turned and the three motor boat boys, with one accord exclaimed:

"Noddy Nixon!"

CHAPTER XVII

INTO A STRANGE LAKE

WHETHER Noddy or the three chums were the more surprised it would be hard to say. Though they had a vague idea they might come across the Cresville bully in Florida, the motor boys did not give it serious consideration, hardly believing Noddy's story about the cocoanut grove. As for Noddy he had no intimation that the boys were coming to Florida and his astonishment, at suddenly seeing them, was very great. His first remark was characteristic of him.

"Are you fellows sneaking after me to try and cheat me out of my grove?" he asked.

"Not much!" ejaculated Jerry. "We didn't know you were here."

"I don't believe you!" retorted Noddy angrily. "You're always trying to do me some injury. Anyhow this man has possession of my cocoanut grove, that I paid my money for, and I'm going to have it."

"How do you know this isn't your grove?"

asked the man with a smile, indicating the swamp land.

"Because the magazine advertisement that I answered said all the groves the company sold were on high ground. I followed the directions in reaching this place and this is the only grove on high ground around here. So it must be mine."

"That's your way of looking at it," replied the man. "But it doesn't happen to be the right one. My name is Carter. If you make some inquiries in the village you will find that I have owned this grove for the last twenty years, and that my father owned it before me."

"I don't believe you!" snapped Noddy. "It's a plot to cheat me out of my money."

"Look here!" exclaimed Mr. Carter. "If I didn't think you were so young and foolish that you didn't know any better I'd make you apologize for that. As it is I'm not going to take any notice of you. Are these young friends of yours? If they are I'd advise them to take you away before you get into trouble with that temper of yours, and the unpleasant way you have of using your tongue."

"We know him," Jerry hastened to say, motioning toward Noddy. "I can't say we're friends of his, nor is he of us. But as we come

from the same town we'd be glad to do what we can for him, though he has done us several mean turns."

"I don't want any of your help!" exclaimed Noddy. "You can mind your own business, Jerry Hopkins, and you too, Bob and Ned. I can get along without you. I'm going to get possession of my cocoanut grove and I'll have this man arrested for keeping it!"

"You're talking foolishly," interposed Mr. Carter.

"I'll sue you!" retorted the Cresville bully. "I tell you I paid a deposit on this grove and I'm going to have it."

"I'm sorry for you, but I think you have been cheated," went on Mr. Carter. "I know that company which pretended to sell you this land. It is a swindling concern. A number of persons have been fooled into buying land here and when they came to take possession of it they found it was a swamp. But you are the first one who tried to lay claim to my land," he added, with a grin.

"You'll find this no laughing matter!" cried Noddy, his anger getting the best of him. "I tell you I'm going to have my rights. I'll see a lawyer."

"Then you'd better start now," said Mr. Carter. "There isn't any in this village, and the nearest one is twenty miles away. We don't have much use for lawyers down here."

"I'll go right away!" cried Noddy. "I'll have my rights, I tell you!"

"Maybe your acquaintances will take you to a lawyer," went on Mr. Carter, who seemed anxious to bring Noddy to his senses. "Any one will tell you that you have been swindled."

"I'll go alone and find some one to take up my case," exclaimed the Cresville youth. "I don't want any help from Jerry Hopkins or any of his gang, either."

"We're not a gang!" objected Bob. "If you say that again, Noddy Nixon, I'll —"

"Go easy," whispered Jerry to his chum. "Let him alone."

"You'll suffer for this!" ejaculated Noddy, glowering at Mr. Carter. "I'll have the law on you! My father is a rich man and he'll help me get my rights. I'll have you arrested for stealing my cocoanut grove!"

"There! You've said enough!" responded the man. "I'll not take any more of your insults! You're on my land and I order you off."

What's more, if you threaten me again I'll tie you up and take you before a justice of the peace! Now move on!"

Mr. Carter looked so angry, and so much in earnest, that, big bully as he was, Noddy was frightened. He muttered something below his breath but he moved off Mr. Carter's land, and on to the edge of the swamp which constituted the "cocoanut grove" of which he had boasted.

"Come on, boys," said Jerry in a low voice. "If we stay here we may get involved in some trouble with Noddy. He doesn't want our aid, and I'm glad of it. I'd hate to take him into our boat. Let's leave him alone."

They started away.

"I'll fix you for following me!" exclaimed Noddy as he saw the three chums leaving him. "I'll get even with you!"

"I hope he comes to his senses soon," remarked Mr. Carter, as he walked toward the village with the three chums. "He is very hot tempered. He arrived in town a few days ago and created quite a stir by talking about the big cocoanut grove he had come to claim. When he found out that it was only a swamp that the swindlers had worked off on him he wanted to get my land, saying a mistake had been made. For several

'days he's been seeking to lay claim to my grove, one of the few near here, until I got tired of his foolishness. Do you know much about him? "

Jerry told Mr. Carter enough of Noddy to make that gentleman understand what sort of a youth the Cresville bully was. Mr. Carter said he was sorry for him, but that he could not afford to give up his land because Noddy had been fooled.

Learning that the chums were in no particular hurry, Mr. Carter invited them up to his house. He gave them a lunch and brought out some fresh cocoanuts, in a green state, which is when they are at their best for eating. He called one of his negro helpers and told him to open some of the nuts for the boys.

The negro set up in the ground a stake, sharpened on the end. Then, holding the nut, encased in its husky fibrous covering in both hands, he brought it down on the point of the stick with a slanting motion. The sharp point cut through the husk in an instant and the nut was exposed. Then the end was chopped off with a big knife and the interior, consisting of "milk " and soft pulp, was ready to eat.

" I never knew cocoanuts were so good! " exclaimed Bob, as he tackled his fourth one, for

they did not eat the rind or hard white part.

"No, nor no one else does who gets only the ripe ones which are shipped north," explained Mr. Carter. "We never think of eating anything but the milk and soft pulp of the partly ripe ones."

Presently the boys bade their host good-bye and started for the village store where they had left the professor catching bugs.

"There!" exclaimed Jerry, when they were almost at the place. "We forgot something."

"What?" asked Ned.

"We didn't give Noddy the message the man gave us. We didn't tell him the government detective wanted to see him."

"Let's go back," suggested Bob.

"I believe you're thinking more of the cocoanuts than you are of Noddy," interposed Jerry. "No, I guess it will keep. Noddy will either go back home, in which case the detective can see him himself, or he will stay here and try to get a grove from some one. If he does the latter we'll stop on our way back and give him the message."

Jerry's chums thought this the best plan, so they kept on, dismissing from their minds the thought of Noddy and his trouble. They found the professor in his element, catching bug after bug, to

the no small amusement of the crowd of natives that had gathered to watch him.

The supplies were soon put aboard the boat, and once more the travelers took up their voyage. For three days they traveled slowly the length of Lake Okeechobee. At times they kept near shore, attracted by the beauty of the scenery, for there were tall palm and palmetto trees, gracefully festooned with long streamers of Spanish moss. There was a wealth of tropical vegetation, and amid the dense forests there flew flocks of birds of the most brilliant plumage.

Now and then they saw big snakes, and they passed several alligators without at first knowing what the saurians were, as they looked so much like floating logs of wood. When they did discover that the "logs" were alive the boys tried several shots at them but without success.

They camped on shore one night but the mosquitoes and fleas were so bad that thereafter they stayed on the boat until out of that district. They caught several fine messes of fish and had a glorious time. At the close of the fourth day they approached the end of the lake. By reference to the map they discovered that they were near to the land of the everglades, those trackless patches of

dense swamp, lonely and dangerous, inhabited only by negroes and Indians.

"We ought to see signs of my prize butterfly soon," remarked the professor as the boat was speeding along. "I hope I shall soon capture a specimen."

"There's some kind of a butterfly!" exclaimed Bob, pointing ahead to where a brilliantly-colored insect was flying over the water.

"Quick!" cried the professor. "Speed up the boat, Jerry. It looks like one!"

The craft was put after the butterfly which was winging its way toward shore. As the *Dartaway* advanced the boys noticed that they were entering a narrow part of the lake. The width of water quickly decreased until they were in what corresponded to a river.

"This is queer," said Jerry. "The map doesn't show any place like this."

"Keep on!" cried the scientist, anxious only about the butterfly.

The insect led them a long chase. Straight ahead it flew, and, as the travelers went on they found themselves between two closely wooded banks.

"We've left Lake Okeechobee behind!" exclaimed Ned.

Hardly had he spoken ere the view changed. They rounded a point of land and came out on a broad sheet of dark green water.

"It's another lake!" exclaimed Jerry. "It must be a strange one, as there is nothing in the guide book about it, or on the map. Boys, maybe we've discovered a new lake!"

"It's big enough!" remarked Ned, as he pointed to the distant shore that marked the boundary.

"Yes, and it's full of alligators!" cried Bob, indicating several long black objects floating in the placid water.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WANDERER AGAIN

"GIVE me a gun!" cried Ned. "I'm going to try and hit one in the eye. I've read that's the place to shoot 'em!"

Jerry steered the boat over to one of the "logs." Ned, who had secured his rifle from the locker, took aim at the nearest creature. He was just about to pull the trigger, having drawn a bead on what he supposed was the eye of the saurian, when the alligator raised its tail and gave the water a slap that sounded like a clap of thunder. In an instant all the other alligators disappeared, the one who had given timely warning diving with its fellows.

"Just my luck!" cried Ned. "But I'll get one yet."

"There goes my butterfly!" exclaimed the professor, as he saw the winged creature, he had been so anxiously watching, take flight over the woods, where it was soon lost to view. "But,

after all I don't believe it was the kind I wanted, though it bore a close resemblance," with which reflection the scientist comforted himself. "However, that shows me we are in the right locality. I'm glad we discovered this new lake, boys."

"Let's name it," suggested Ned.

"Call it Alligator Lake," put in Jerry.

"No, Butterfly Lake would be better," suggested Bob, "because the professor hopes to catch his prize specimen here."

"Good idea," agreed Jerry. "Butterfly Lake it is."

Seeing a little cove about a mile ahead, Jerry steered the boat in that direction and, as it was found to be a good stopping place, the craft was moored near the edge of the water. The boys and the professor went ashore. They found themselves in the midst of a patch of everglades, though close to the lake the land was more firm than anywhere else.

"I'd hate to be lost in a swamp like that," remarked Ned, indicating the vast expanse that lay about them.

"There are paths through it," said Mr. Snodgrass. "But I guess only the negroes and Indians know them. It would be quite risky for any one unacquainted with them to venture in.

[The swamp would swallow a man as quickly as if he fell into quicksand.]”

“The boat for mine!” exclaimed Bob. “This is worse than the swamp Noddy got fooled on.”

While supper was being prepared, the professor got out his nets and cyanide bottle in readiness for a chase after the prize butterfly.

“I’ll begin the search the first thing in the morning,” he said, and he was up before daylight, walking along the shores of the lake looking for the brilliant creature with a pink body and blue and gold wings. However, the kind of insect he wanted seemed to be very scarce, and he came back empty-handed after the boys had finished their meal, rather tired but not a bit discouraged. “I’ll get it yet,” he said. “We’ll cruise along the shores.”

They found the strange lake was quite a large body of water. The lower end of it was so filled with stumps that they did not venture to take the boat in for fear of striking a snag and stoving a hole in the bottom. But, though they covered many miles they did not catch a glimpse of the rare butterfly.

Bob and Ned tried several shots at alligators, of which there were many, but, though Bob was

sure, once, that he hit one, the saurian did not give any evidence of it, and sank from sight.

If the scientist did not get the butterfly he wanted, he was successful in capturing a number of other specimens of insects, which seemed to delight him almost as much as if he had the pink and blue beauty.

"Even if I can't get the five thousand dollars," he said, "perhaps I can bring back to the museum enough valuable specimens so that I will get the position I want."

"Oh, we'll get that butterfly for you," said Jerry, who was anxious to help the professor.

"Suppose we go back toward the river that connects Lake Okeechobee and Butterfly Lake," suggested Ned. "That's where we saw the butterfly that looked like the one you want."

"A good idea," replied Mr. Snodgrass. "I'm sure it is to be found in this vicinity, as all the books say it is usually to be seen in company with the butterfly with plain blue wings, and that is the one we chased yesterday."

Accordingly the *Dartaway* was swung around, and was soon speeding toward the narrow stretch of water that connected the two lakes. As they entered it the boys noticed that there was a cur-

rent flowing from Butterfly Lake into Lake Okeechobee.

"I hadn't noticed that before," said Jerry. Butterfly Lake must be one of the feeders of the larger body of water."

As the *Dartaway* emerged from the "river" upon the bosom of Lake Okeechobee once more Jerry pointed ahead and cried out:

"Look there, boys!"

"It's another boat!" said Bob.

"A houseboat to judge by the looks of it," put in Ned.

"I think it's our old friend the *Wanderer*," remarked Jerry. "I'll see if they answer our signal."

He gave three toots on the compressed air whistle, and a moment later they were replied to from the houseboat, which was about a mile away. Then something like a white handkerchief was waved from the deck.

"They see us!" exclaimed Bob. "Those are the girls."

"Put over there, Jerry," said Ned. "I'd like to see 'em again."

"Which one?" asked Jerry with a laugh, and Ned blushed a bit.

Mr. Seabury and his three daughters were glad

to meet the boys once more. The professor and the youths were invited aboard and, though Mr. Snodgrass wanted to continue his search for the butterfly, he was induced to accept the invitation.

"We'll help you look for that curious insect," said Rose Seabury. "We are going to stay on Lake Okeechobee for some time, and perhaps we'll come across it."

"I hope you do," remarked the scientist. "I shall be very much obliged to you if you find a specimen and I'll share the reward with you."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" exclaimed the young lady. "I'm sure if I could be a little aid to the advancement of science it would be reward enough."

Several pleasant hours were spent aboard the *Wanderer* and after dinner, for which Mr. Seabury insisted that his guests remain, they all sat on the cool upper deck viewing the beauties of the lake.

"Isn't that a canoe putting out from shore?" asked the owner of the houseboat, pointing to a small object on the water.

"That's what it is," answered Nellie, looking through a pair of marine glasses. "There are negroes in it."

"Oh, those ugly black men!" exclaimed Olivia.

"I can't bear them. They are not like the colored men up north."

"They seem to be headed this way," went on Mr. Seabury, taking the glasses from his daughter. "I wonder what they want?"

The canoe rapidly approached. In a short time it was close enough so that, without the aid of glasses, there could be made out in it three negroes. They were paddling straight for the houseboat, to which the *Dartaway* was made fast. When the small craft came within hailing distance one of the negroes called out:

"Is a gen'men dar what's lookin' fo' rare bugs an' butterflies?"

"I am," replied Mr. Snodgrass. "I particularly want a pink butterfly with blue and gold wings."

"We knows whar to find him!" exclaimed the foremost paddler. "We'll show yo' if yo' uns'll come along."

"I wouldn't go with them if I were you," said Mr. Seabury in low tones. "They may be very treacherous."

CHAPTER XIX

A PLOT FOILED

"WAIT until I speak to them," replied Mr. Snodgrass, preparing to descend to the lower deck. "I must not lose a chance to get that butterfly."

He was soon in conversation with the colored men, who explained they had heard of the scientist's object from one of their number who had come from the village where the travelers had last stopped, and where the professor had talked of the butterfly.

"I hope he doesn't allow himself to be persuaded to accompany those men," said Mr. Seabury to the three boys. "I believe they would kill him for what valuables he carried, once they got him off in the swamp."

"Are they as bad as that?" asked Ned.

"They are worse than the Seminole Indians," declared Mr. Seabury. "I would sooner trust one of the latter than a negro of the everglades."

"I hope the professor doesn't go," remarked Rose. "I like him so much. He's just like a

very old friend of mine who was a teacher in the college I attended."

"Mr. Snodgrass is his own master," said Mr. Seabury. "We can only advise him."

At that moment the scientist came back on the upper deck.

"I'm on the right track," he declared, his eyes shining with excitement. "Those colored men know just where the butterfly has its haunts. I'm going with them. It is only a day's journey."

"We'll go along in the motor boat as far as possible," said Jerry.

"No, no!" objected Mr. Snodgrass. "We have to go into the swamp where only a canoe can be used. Besides, the puffing of the boat's engine might frighten the butterfly. I must go alone with these men. They are honest I'm sure. They will make a camp for the night and they say they have food enough for me also."

"Of course you know your own business," said Mr. Seabury, "but I wouldn't trust them, professor."

"Oh, I'm sure they will not harm me," the scientist replied. "Besides, I have nothing they could steal. I have promised to pay them well if they bring me to the place where I can get my prize butterfly."

"Where is the place?" asked Jerry.

"It lies to the east of the lake we discovered," replied the scientist. "I must start at once. Those butterflies are scarce and I can't afford to take any chances on losing one."

In spite of the dangers that Mr. Seabury and his daughters hinted at, and the objections the boys raised, the professor was determined to accompany the colored men. Mr. Seabury went below and took a look at the negroes. He had to admit that they were good-natured appearing enough, with broad grins on their shining, black faces and a manner which seemed to preclude any desire to do any one an injury.

"Since you have to start from Butterfly Lake why not go with us as far as there in the motor boat," proposed Ned. "The men can follow in their canoe, or we'll tow them. Then we can make a permanent camp, and you'll know where to head for when you get ready to come back with your butterfly."

This seemed a good idea to the professor and he agreed to it. The colored men made no objection, but, on the other hand, seemed to favor the proposition, which made Mr. Seabury all the more suspicious.

"I believe those negroes are up to some trick,"

he said to his daughters as their visitors prepared to leave. "I can't say what it is, but I'm very suspicious. I don't believe those black men know anything about the butterfly."

"What can we do, father?" asked Rose.

"Nothing, I'm afraid. Yet I'll be on the watch. The *Wanderer* is not a fast boat, but I think I'll keep it near the entrance to Butterfly Lake for a few days. I may be able to render some assistance to the professor."

When good-byes had been said, and assurances given on the part of Mr. Snodgrass and the boys that they would see their friends of the houseboat again, the *Dartaway*, towing the canoe with the three negroes, was headed for the stream of water that connected the two lakes.

A good place for a camp was found near a small stream that flowed through the everglades, and up which watercourse the negroes said they proposed taking the professor in the canoe to search for the butterfly.

"We'll be waiting here for you," remarked Jerry, as the scientist got his butterfly-catching accessories together.

"No telling when I'll be back," answered Uriah Snodgrass. "I'm going to get that prize insect, and it may take longer than these men think."

"Oh, yo'll git yo' butterfly," said one of the negroes with a broad grin. "We knows whar dere's lots ob 'em."

"Hadn't you better wait until morning?" suggested Ned. "It's well along in the afternoon now, and you can make an early start to-morrow."

But the professor would hear of no delay. He had often spent many hours in the open while searching for curiosities of nature, and a night in the everglades did not alarm him. The negroes said they would find some sort of shelter, and, having packed up some food, the scientist announced he was ready.

With mingled feelings the boys watched their friend go off in the canoe with the colored men. They were disturbed by a vague uneasiness, but none of them could tell what it was.

"Well," remarked Ned, when a turn of the sluggish swamp stream hid the canoe from sight, "we've no time to lose. We must make camp before it gets dark."

Willing hands made light work of setting up the tent and moving into it blankets and bed clothing for the night. The *Dartaway* was moored in a little cove, and after supper Bob and Ned took their guns and set out for a shot at some loons, of which there were many about the lake. Jerry

carried his rifle, hoping to get a chance at an alligator.

The boys followed the edge of the lake, keeping watch for anything in the way of game. They saw several loons, but the queer, big birds were so far away that a shot was impossible. As Bob walked along, a little in advance, he came to a sudden stop behind a clump of bushes.

"Easy!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "I see one!"

He took careful aim and pulled the trigger. When the smoke had cleared away the three chums looked eagerly over the water where, a second before, a big bird had been seen.

"You've blown him to pieces!" exclaimed Ned.

"Missed him altogether," said Jerry with a smile. "Loons, you know, dive at the flash of the gun, and they're under water before the shot gets anywhere near them."

An instant later the big bird bobbed up from the water, some distance away from the spot where Bob had fired at it.

"There he is!" cried Ned.

He took a quick shot, but it seemed to be only fun for the bird, that instantly dived under the water again.

"Why don't you play fair!" exclaimed Bob in disgust. "I never saw such a bird."

"That's the only protection it's got against guns," said Jerry. "You can't blame it. You'd do the same. Besides, what good are they after you shoot 'em? You can't eat 'em."

"Sour grapes!" remarked Ned with a laugh. "But I guess you're right, Jerry. We can't hit 'em, at any rate."

They walked on for some distance farther and then, as it was getting dusk, returned to camp.

"I don't believe I'll have to have any one sing me to sleep to-night," said Bob as he prepared for bed. "I'm dead tired. How about you, Ned?"

"I guess I can get along without a dose of soothing syrup."

"I was thinking we'd better stand watch," remarked Jerry.

"Why?" asked Ned.

"To tell you the truth I don't like the idea of those colored men being in this neighborhood. Where there are three I think there are sure to be more. Of course they may be harmless enough, but I have an idea they are desperate men, and our camp and boat offers quite a temptation to them."

"Oh, I don't believe they'll bother us," said

Bob. "Let's get what sleep we can. Leave a lantern where we can light it in a hurry if we hear any suspicious noises."

Ned sided with Bob, and Jerry, somewhat against his will, gave in to them. However, he determined to stay awake as long as he could. He also arranged some fishing lines about the camp so that if any intruders came in they would trip on them and bring down a collection of pots and pans which he arranged to fall at the slightest disturbance.

"That will do for a burglar alarm," he said.

Jerry's intention of remaining awake was well meant, but nature asserted herself and he was soon slumbering as soundly as his chums.

It was well that Jerry had set his burglar alarm. or, otherwise the sleep-locked eyes of the boys never would have detected the stealthy approach of several dark figures that stole around the camp about midnight. They were figures that crept closer and closer with silent footsteps, figures that whispered now and then among themselves, and, had any one been listening, they would have easily recognized the whispers as those of negro voices.

But the fish lines did not sleep. They did their duty and, when one of the men caught his foot in a cord, and brought down, with a resounding

clatter and crash, a pile of tins, the three boys awoke with a start.

"Quick! The guns!" cried Jerry.

He struck a match and lighted a lantern which was ready at hand, no lights having been left burning because they attracted mosquitoes and other insects.

Bob and Ned grabbed their rifles. An instant later the gleam of a lantern shone out, and disclosed several negroes about the *Dartaway*. Some were in the craft and others appeared to be shoving her off the bank on which her keel rested.

"They're stealing our boat!" yelled Bob.

An instant later he fired, purposely aiming over the heads of the intruders. Ned followed his example. There was a yell of terror from the black men and, with one accord they seemed to disappear from sight. Jerry ran out with the lantern.

"I think we foiled their plot," he remarked, as he saw that the boat was still in place, though on the point of floating away.

CHAPTER XX

BOB TAKEN ILL

SECURING the boat, Jerry took a survey of the camp. Ned and Bob had lighted other lanterns and, by their gleams, it could be seen that nothing had been taken. The improvised burglar alarm had given timely notice, or the boys might have mourned the loss of the *Dartaway*, as well as other of their possessions.

"They seem to have gotten away," remarked Jerry, coming back from where he had made the motor boat fast. "I wonder how they got here?"

"In a canoe," answered Ned, pointing to the marks of where the keel of one had rested on the little beach of the lake. "But what was that tremendous racket?"

"A little invention of mine," and Jerry explained it.

"I wonder who they were?" asked Bob.

"Some of the same negroes with whom the professor has gone off," replied Jerry.

"Do you really think so?"

"I do. I believe it is all a part of a scheme to rob him and us. Those men wanted to get him out of the way so they could plunder our camp. I guess they thought we were boys who had never been out alone before."

"They think differently now," observed Bob. "I reckon my bullet went uncomfortably close to some of 'em."

"We may have scared them off for the time being," went on Jerry, "but we've got to be on the watch. Our camp represents a lot of wealth to those colored men, and they'll stop at nothing, short of a gun, to get it. It'll have to be watch and watch after this."

"You're right," agreed Ned. "We should have done it at first. But it's not too late, thanks to the fish-line burglar alarm."

The boys arranged to spend the rest of the night taking turns at standing guard, but their precautions were needless, for they were not disturbed again. In the morning they made a more careful examination and, by the tracks in the mud, came to the conclusion that at least five men had endeavored to loot the camp.

"What about the professor?" asked Bob, when they had discussed the occurrences of the night.

"I'm worried about him," admitted Jerry. "He's such an innocent and trusting gentleman that he'd do anything those scoundrels asked him to. I suppose by this time they have him several miles away from here."

"Do you think they'll harm him?" asked Ned.

"Maybe not. They'll certainly rob him, and they may turn him adrift in the everglades, and that's the worst thing they could do. He'll never be able to find his way out."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Ned.

"I don't want to take too gloomy a view of it," went on Jerry, "but you must admit it looks serious."

"Still, the professor is a smart man. He's used to going in dense woods after insects and finding his way out," said Bob. "Look at the different places he has been with us — even in the buried city in Mexico — and he got out all right."

"This is different," Jerry stated. "The everglades are worse than any forest. If he gets off the firm ground he'll sink down in the swamp and never be able to get out. Boys, I wish the professor was safely back with us. But there's no help for it now, and all we can do is to wait. Perhaps I'm too nervous and he may turn up all right, but the attack on the camp looks bad."

"Poor old professor!" murmured Ned. "I'd hate to have anything happen to him."

"So would I," put in Bob, "but I guess, as Jerry says, there's nothing to be done but to wait."

The day seemed very long, for they were watching for the return of the scientist. No one had the heart to do anything, and the boys sat listlessly about the camp, even Bob having a poor appetite for his meals.

Toward afternoon Ned proposed that they take their guns and a walk along the edge of the lake, not going far away from camp.

"We might see something to shoot at," he said. "It will make the time pass quicker, and if there are any negroes hiding about they'll hear the guns and know we're on the watch."

The plan was agreed to, and the boys tried several shots at loons and alligators. Jerry succeeded in wounding one of the big saurians, but the creature buried itself in the mud and the boys could not get it.

"We'll take the boat to-morrow," said Ned, "and have a try at some of these big lizards. If we could skin one or two we'd have some nice hides to show for our trip."

"Excuse me from skinning alligators," re-

marked Bob, making a wry face. "The weather is too hot."

As they started back for camp Bob espied a bush laden with yellow fruit. He approached it on the run.

"Just what I've been wishing for!" he exclaimed, pulling off some and beginning to eat them.

"Hold on!" cried Jerry. "What are those things? They may be poison."

"They're mangoes," answered Bob, eating his second one.

"Are you sure?" and Jerry looked doubtful.

"Of course," answered the always-hungry youth. "I've read about them and I know."

"Better leave 'em alone," advised Jerry. "They may be the mango fruit, but I wouldn't take any chances. Besides, if they are mangoes, this variety, from having grown in the everglades, may be poisonous."

"They don't taste so," remarked Bob, continuing to eat the fruit, which smelled delicious and had a fine appearance. "Better have some, Ned."

"No, thanks. Camp stuff is good enough for me when I'm not sure of what the other is."

Bob continued to enjoy himself on the fruit, which certainly was tempting. He only laughed at the warnings of his companions, and filled his pockets with the yellow things, a number of which he took back to camp.

In accordance with the plan of the previous night, the boys maintained a watch. The fish-line alarm was set again, and with a lantern burning down near the boat, where it would disclose any persons who might try to sneak up and cut the mooring lines, Ned and Jerry prepared to turn in. It was Bob's turn to stand first watch. The boys had not lost their uneasy feeling concerning the professor, and they hoped every moment to hear his cheery hail as he returned.

"Don't you wish you'd brought some of the mangoes?" asked Bob of his chums, producing some of the yellow fruit as he prepared to begin his tour of duty. "This will keep me awake."

"Call us at the slightest sign of danger," cautioned Jerry, as he went inside the tent.

It seemed that he and Ned had been sleeping but a short time when they were suddenly aroused by Bob shaking them.

"What is it? The Negroes again?" asked Jerry as he sat up and grabbed his gun.

“No,” replied Bob in a faint voice. “Oh, Jerry, I’m awful sick! I guess it was those mangoes. I can hardly stand! Can’t you do something for me?”

CHAPTER XXI

JERRY SEEKS AID

JERRY was up in an instant and soon lit a lantern. By the glimmer of it he saw that Bob was indeed a very sick youth. The lad's face was flushed, his hands were cold and clammy and his face and head were hot with a burning fever. His eyes had an unnaturally bright look, his breath came fast, and in short gasps.

"Why Bob!" exclaimed Ned. "What is the matter?"

"It came on me suddenly," said the unfortunate lad, sitting down on the ground in the tent. "I was going to eat some more of the mangoes when, all at once, I was seized with a fit of trembling."

As he spoke a series of tremors shook his body, and he seemed about to fall over. Jerry caught him.

"Quick, Ned!" he exclaimed. "Help me get Bob to bed. Then we'll see what we can do."

They undressed Bob, who continued to shake and shiver for he had a chill alternating with his

fever. Then, while Jerry and Ned were worrying over the matter and pondering what to do, the poor lad's temperature suddenly went up and he was in a higher fever.

"We've got to do something to bring that down," remarked Jerry. "What did they give you when you were sick, Ned?" and Jerry looked at his chum.

"It's so long since I was sick I've forgotten," was the answer. "Have we any medicine at all?"

"Mother made me bring some quinine along, and a few other things, like witch hazel and sticking plaster, but I don't believe any of them are good for fevers. I'll look in the box."

Jerry proceeded to investigate the small case of simple remedies his mother had packed, but which had never been opened. The chums were seldom ill, and when they were they usually let nature adjust itself. But they realized that something must be done for Bob.

"'Spirits of nitre,'" read Ned from the label of one of the bottles. "Say, Jerry, this is the stuff for fevers. I remember my mother used to use it when I was a little chap. Let's give him some."

Jerry read the label on the bottle. The nitre, according to the directions, was good for fevers

and they decided to give Bob a larger dose than was called for, as they had an idea the stuff was for children, and that a full grown youth would need more.

Anxiously they waited for the remedy to have some effect. Every now and then they would place their hands on Bob's head or wrist to note the warmth of his body. To their worriment he seemed to be getting hotter instead of cooler. The fever indeed was rising fast and poor Bob was in a bad way.

"Doesn't seem to be strong enough," said Jerry after three hours of dreary watching. They had dressed and sat in the tent which was dimly lighted by a lantern.

"Let's give him some more," Ned suggested.

Another dose was administered, though Bob fought against taking it. The youth was hardly conscious of what he was doing. He lay with closed eyes, his face red and flushed from the fever, and his breath coming in short, labored gasps.

Suddenly the sick boy raised himself up on the cot where he had been placed.

"There he is!" he exclaimed.

"Who?" asked Jerry, thinking Bob saw some one.

"That alligator! He has the big snake and

they are both being chased by the sea cow! Where's my gun?"

"Out of his head," whispered Ned, as he gently pressed Bob back on the bed. "What shall we do?"

Jerry did not know what to say. This was a new complication, for their journeys heretofore had been free from the worry of serious illness.

"My, but he's hot!" went on Ned, feeling of Bob's hand. "We ought to have an ice bag for him."

"No ice here, but I've just thought of something we can do."

"What?"

"Dip cloths in water and put 'em on him. That'll help some."

"Good idea."

They dipped several large handkerchiefs into the lake, wrung them out, and laid them on Bob's forehead, neck and chest. It was a crude expedient but it was the best they could do. In the hot climate the water evaporated quickly and the cloths were made cooler from this cause than they otherwise would have been. Bob seemed a little easier, though he continued to moan and murmur in his delirium.

It was a long, weary night and, when they gray

dawn began to show, Ned and Jerry were two very much alarmed youths.

"If the professor would only come back!" exclaimed Ned. "He'd know what to do for Bob. He always carries medicine with him. I wish he would come."

"Maybe he left some of his medicines in the boat."

"If he did I wouldn't risk using them. We might give Bob the wrong thing."

"That's so. I wonder if anything could have happened to Mr. Snodgrass?"

"I hope not," responded Ned. "Still he ought to be back by this time."

"Give me some ice water!" suddenly called Bob, sitting up on the cot.

"I wish we had some," said Jerry in a low voice as he gently pushed his chum's head back on the pillow. "He's on fire," he added, turning to Ned.

"Give him some more nitre."

The medicine was administered with considerable difficulty for, as the fever progressed Bob fought against taking it, as the stuff was not very pleasant. Still Ned and Jerry knew it was the only thing they had, and they fairly forced Bob to swallow it.

The day was worse than the night, though at times the patient dozed and was quiet. The two youths listened for every sound that might indicate the return of the professor but he did not come. It grew hotter and hotter and then it began to rain.

With the storm came a cloud of mosquitoes that made life miserable for the boys. It was stifling to stay in the tent, yet that was their only refuge. They had mosquito netting, and this kept out the most of the pests, but Ned and Jerry had to make frequent trips to the lake for fresh water, and on these occasions the insects pitched on them with great violence.

Bob grew worse, and the two watchers were much alarmed. They did not know what to do. They only had a little of the nitre left and it did not seem to be doing any good. The truth was Bob needed a much stronger remedy than that which the boys had.

All day long the rain fell and the next night was one of the worst the boys had ever put in. They took turns sitting up with Bob who continually cried for ice water when there was none to be had. Ned and Jerry lived on cold victuals. As for Bob he only sipped a little water now and then.

"Do you think he'll die?" asked Ned in gloomy

accents, as Jerry awoke to take his turn at watching.

"No! Of course not. What makes you think that?"

"Because he doesn't seem to get any better."

"He can't get better at once. I think it was that yellow fruit he ate which has made him sick. You and I didn't take any and we're all right."

"Then Bob is poisoned."

"I'm afraid so. Still this may be the worst of it. As long as he has gotten along so far, with nothing more than a high fever, I'm sure he'll pull through."

But the fever was bad enough. Bob began to weaken under the attack. The second day he could not raise himself in bed. He reclined there with closed eyes and his breathing was more labored.

"Why doesn't the professor come!" exclaimed Ned.

"I tell you what I believe!" exclaimed Jerry. "Mr. Snodgrass is being detained by those negroes!"

"Do you think so?"

"I do. I believe they had a plot to get possession of all our things. We scared off those who came to the camp but the others have Mr. Snodgrass a captive, I'm sure."

"What are we going to do? If Bob doesn't get some other medicine soon — he'll die."

"I know what I'm going to do!" said Jerry in determined tones.

"What?"

"I'm going to find the professor!"

"How can you?"

"I'm going to follow that little stream," and Jerry pointed to the one up which the scientist had journeyed in the canoe with the negroes.

"But you have no boat. The *Dartaway* draws too much to take up that creek."

"I know it. I'm going to walk. I see there is a sort of path along the edge of the stream. I'm going to see where it leads to. I may not find the professor, but I'll try and find some one who can help us. Maybe I can run across a band of Indians and get some of their remedies. If only Ottiby was here he'd be able to give Bob something to make him well. Will you be afraid to stay here alone with Bob, Ned?"

"No, of course not. But hurry back. There's no telling what may happen."

"I'll bring the professor back with me, or some medicine for Bob," said Jerry, as he prepared for his journey.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RECEDING WATER

JERRY started off early the next morning. The rain had ceased but there was a thick fog and, because of the moist vegetation of the tropics, water fairly dripped from the trees, festooned as they were with long streamers of moss and vines.

"I hate to leave you, Ned," Jerry remarked as he shouldered his gun and put some bread and pieces of bacon into his pocket. "But it can't be helped. I'll try and get back by night, even if I don't find the professor."

"Do the best you can, Jerry. I'll look after Bob."

It was with no small sense of loneliness that Ned watched Jerry disappear into the forest. The trees soon hid him from sight and then Ned set about getting the camp in some sort of order, for they had rather neglected it of late. Bob turned and tossed on his couch. The fever still burned within him but he was much weaker and did not need to be so closely watched. For want of some-

thing better Ned administered more nitre, and Bob no longer fought against taking it.

"Poor Bob!" said Ned with a sigh. "I'd rather you'd kick up a fuss. I'd know then you had some life left in you."

But Bob meekly swallowed the mixture, and when Ned took his arm from under his chum's head it fell back listlessly on the pillow.

Ned thought the day would never end. He had not the heart to cook anything and ate the remainder of the cold food. He sat in front of the tent gloomily looking at the lake and wondering whether Jerry would find the professor.

Now and then Bob would call out but when Ned hurried in he would find his chum murmuring in delirium. All he could do was to wet the fever-parched lips with water, and renew the damp cloths on the sufferer's head and chest.

"Poor Bob," said Ned with a sigh. "I wish you hadn't eaten that strange fruit."

As the afternoon wore away Ned listened anxiously for the sound of Jerry's returning footsteps. For want of something better to do to while away the time he began cleaning the engine of the *Dart-away*.

It was while doing this that he happened to

look at the edge of the lake. Something queer about it attracted his attention.

"If I didn't know differently," he said to himself, "I'd say the tide was falling. It looks just as if the water was lower."

Feeling sure that such a thing was impossible, Ned went on working at the engine. A little later he again gazed over the side of the boat. This time he started in surprise.

"I'm positive that stone wasn't so far out of water the last time I looked," he said, speaking aloud. "I wonder if this lake can be connected with the ocean in some manner, and is affected by the tide? No, it can't be, or we'd have noticed it before. Yet the water is surely running away."

He got out of the *Dartaway*. He was much alarmed to see that nearly half of the craft was now out of the lake, whereas a while before only the bow-end had rested on the sandy beach.

"The lake is surely lowering," Ned went on. "I must watch and see how fast it is falling."

He marked where the water came on shore and sat down to wait. He was too much worried to be able to go on working. Bob called, and he went in to see what was wanted. He gave his chum a drink and administered some more medi-

cine. He was in the tent a half hour, and when he came out he was surprised to see that the water was half an inch from the mark.

"It's falling at the rate of an inch an hour," said Ned. "This is getting serious. I wish Jerry and the professor would come back."

Ned watched the lake. There was no mistake about it, the water was slowly falling. More and more of the *Dartaway's* keel was exposed.

"This'll never do!" exclaimed Ned. "In a short time the boat will be aground and we'll have a hard time getting it afloat again. I must shove it further into the lake."

He tried to do it but found the task was beyond his strength. Pull, push and tug as he did he could not stir the boat. The stern, with the screw, was still in deep water and he started the engine on the reverse, hoping to be able to have the craft move out further into the lake under its own power. But though the propeller churned the water the craft did not budge.

"It's no use," remarked Ned. "I'll have to wait until Jerry and the professor come back. I wonder what makes the water flow away? It can't be the tide."

He was much puzzled, and the more he thought of it the more he was alarmed. Suppose the lake

should suddenly go dry? It would be impossible to get the *Dartaway* to Lake Okeechobee in that case and they would have to abandon the craft in the everglades. Worse than that they would have hard work in leaving Florida, as they were in an uninhabited part.

"We certainly are up against it!" exclaimed Ned, as he shut off the engine after his fruitless attempt. "What in the world am I going to do?"

There was no one to answer his question, and once more he sat down despondently in front of the tent and gazed at the receding water.

It was beginning to get dusk and Ned knew it would soon be dark as there was practically no twilight in this semi-tropical land.

"I wish Jerry would come back," he murmured. "I don't like the idea of staying here alone with Bob all night."

He went into the tent to give the patient a drink. As he was coming out he heard the crackling of underbrush. It indicated the approach of some one. Ned hurried to the flap of the tent. He saw through the semi-darkness a figure approaching.

"Jerry!" he called.

"Yes, it's me, Ned. How's Bob?"

"No better. Did you find the professor?"

"No. I went as far as I could. The path ended in a deep swamp and I couldn't see any way to get across. I had to come back. Is everything all right?"

"No, Jerry. I'm afraid we're in for a streak of bad luck."

"How so?"

"Butterfly Lake is lowering."

"The lake lowering! What do you mean?"

"I hardly know myself. Either it's connected with the ocean and the tide is falling, or the bottom has dropped out."

"This lake isn't connected with the tide."

"Then there's a leak in it."

"Are you sure, Ned?"

"Take a look."

The two youths hurried down to the edge of the water. Ned pointed to the *Dartaway*. The water had receded so much that the propellor was part way out.

"You know how it was when we left it," said Ned. "Now look at it. I tried to get the boat off into deeper water but I couldn't. Queer, isn't it?"

"More than queer," responded Jerry in tired accents, for he was very weary. "This is serious, Ned. We'll have to do something."

"Better have something to eat first," suggested Ned. "You're played out. I'll make some coffee."

He lighted the fire and soon had some of the steaming beverage ready. He took some and so did Jerry. Then they looked at Bob. The poor chap was no better, but the boys were a little encouraged that he was no worse.

"He's holding his own," remarked Ned.

"Yes, but if the fever doesn't break up soon he'll —"

Jerry didn't finish, and Ned did not ask him what he meant.

"The nitre is all gone," went on Ned. "I don't know what to give him now."

"We'll bathe him in witch hazel," suggested Jerry. "That has alcohol in it, and I've heard that's what they wash fever patients in. It may do him some good."

Bob did seem a little more comfortable after Ned and Jerry had sponged him with the witch hazel, of which they had a large bottle. But the fever was soon raging again, and poor Bob tossed more restlessly than before, while he murmured in his delirium of ice water and other cooling drinks.

Morning came at last. As soon as it was light Jerry hurried down to the lake. What he saw

caused him to cry out in surprise. The *Dartaway* was now ten feet from the edge.

"There's only thing to do!" exclaimed Jerry.

"What is that?" asked Ned.

"We've got to get the boat into the deep water. Otherwise it will soon be so far away we can't float her."

"How are you going to do it?"

"We'll have to cut down some small trees for rollers and edge it along that way."

"But what about Bob?"

"We'll have to put him on board first."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PROFESSOR RETURNS

URGED on by the seriousness of their plight, the two boys lost no time in getting to work. With small axes which formed a part of their camp accessories they chopped down several palmetto trees. They were of soft wood and easy to work. Ned and Jerry soon had several rollers made.

These were placed in position to slide the boat on them into the lake, which kept receding.

"How we going to get back into Lake Okeecho-bee," asked Ned. "The connecting river must be dried up by this time."

"Probably it is, but we've got to get the *Dart-away* afloat now or never. We'll have to take our chances on getting out of here."

Before rolling the boat down into the receding water the awning was put up and a bunk gotten ready for Bob. Then he was carried down into it. He was too sick to know or care what was going on.

"Now for some hard work," remarked Jerry,

as he and Ned got ready to move the *Dartaway*.

They found it a difficult task. More than once they felt like giving up but they knew they must proceed if they were to have the use of their craft. It took them almost half a day to accomplish it. They used long branches of trees for levers and, inch by inch the motor boat was shoved astern until the propellor dipped once more into the lake.

"Almost done!" exclaimed Ned with a sigh.

"Yes, thank goodness," echoed Jerry.

Half an hour more of work and the craft floated. The boys brought their camp stuff and packed it into the boat, striking the tent since they could no longer remain on shore so far away from the water. Fortunately the falling of the lake left exposed a hard shell beach instead of a lot of soft mud, or the boys would never have been able to make trips back and forth with their camping accessories.

"Now what?" asked Ned as they sat in the boat.

"We'll have to wait here, or in this neighborhood, for the professor," said Jerry. "He's liable to come back at any minute."

"If he comes back at all!"

"It does look bad," admitted Jerry, in answer

to Ned's gloomy words. "But I guess he can take care of himself."

"Those negroes are ugly customers," said Ned. "I wish we could come across Mr. Seabury again. He might be able to suggest a plan."

"I'm afraid we'll not see him in a hurry. He can't get to us and we can't get to him with the river that connected the two lakes all dried up. I wonder what caused this sudden falling away of the water?"

"You've got me," replied Ned. "I've puzzled over it until I can't think straight. But let's cruise about a bit. It's hot and we may strike a breeze out on the lake. Perhaps we can find the outlet through which the water is all disappearing."

To this plan Jerry agreed. It was much cooler with the boat swiftly in motion, and Bob seemed to feel easier. Now and then he would rouse up and ask some question, but, before his chums could answer he would again sink into the stupor of fever. The boat was sent in a wide circle of the lake. It was so large that it did not seem to have grown appreciably smaller when the chums looked at it some distance from shore. But once the beach was approached the appearance of rocks that had long been under water told the story.

"We don't want to go very far away from where we were camped," said Jerry. "It would be too bad if the professor should come back and not find us. We must keep within sight of where we were."

They passed the afternoon cruising about in sight of where they had last seen Mr. Snodgrass. When it grew dark, lanterns were lighted and hung about the boat.

"He can see them from shore and hail us," remarked Jerry.

"Hark!" cried Bob, suddenly sitting up in his bunk. "My mother is calling me! I'm coming!" he cried and began throwing off the light covering which Jerry had placed over him.

"His mind is wandering," said Ned as he hurried to his chum's side. "He fancies he hears some one calling."

At that moment there came a voice from out of the darkness. A voice sounding far away.

"Boys! Where are you?" came across the water.

"What's that?" cried Jerry.

"The professor!" exclaimed Ned. "It's his voice!"

Jerry sprang to the engine and set it in motion.

"We're coming!" yelled Ned.

Jerry opened the muffler and the sound of the motor's explosions sounded loud on the still night.

"He'll hear that better than he will our shouts," he remarked, as he steered the boat toward where the camp had been.

Bob grew quieter as the motion of the boat soothed him. In a short time the craft was close enough to shore, for the professor's voice to be plainly heard.

"What's the matter?" he called.

"Bottom dropped out of the lake," cried Ned, giving his favorite reason for the strange action of the water. "We'll come as close as we can. Are you all right?"

"Fairly so," answered Mr. Snodgrass.

He was soon aboard and, in a few words, the boys told him what had happened since he went away.

"Bob sick!" the scientist exclaimed. "Let me look at him. I have some medicine among my things."

By the light of a lantern Mr. Snodgrass examined Bob. He seemed grave when he had finished and at once began searching among his boxes.

"Is he — is he very bad?" asked Jerry.

"I'm afraid so," was the reply. "The fever has been allowed to run too long. You did the

best you could, but the medicine you had was not strong enough. What I have will hardly answer but it is the best I can do. It may break up the fever. I'll try it at any rate."

The professor soon had a dose mixed and gave it to Bob. In a little while the lad's breathing was easier, and he seemed to be sleeping more naturally.

"Perhaps it will do," said the scientist, as he felt of the patient's pulse.

"Now tell us about yourself," urged Ned. "We were very anxious about you. What happened?"

"Well, I had rather a narrow escape. Mr. Seabury was right about those scoundrels. They wanted to rob me, and had no intention of leading me to where I could find the rare butterfly. I discovered this when it came night and they said it was two days' journey further on. I wanted to come back, as I knew you would be worried, but they acted so ugly I thought I had better do as they wished. I stayed with them in a rude camp they made, but I didn't go to sleep. I heard something which made me think they might attack you boys."

"They did but we drove 'em off," said Jerry.

"Good for you! Well, I insisted on being

led to the butterflies the next day, but they kept making excuses. Finally I managed to get away by a trick and I started for our camp.

"I lost my way and had to spend another night in the everglades. Fortunately I had my compass with me and I had taken note of the general direction we traveled in. There are some trails through the everglades and I managed to follow them. At last I struck the one along the stream on which they had taken me in their canoe and I knew I was safe. But I didn't get my butterfly. Now what is this about the falling lake?"

The boys told him, and Mr. Snodgrass looked worried. He could not explain the phenomenon, but said they would make an investigation in the morning.

In spite of his weariness the scientist insisted on sitting up that night with Bob. The boat was anchored well off from shore but near enough to be pulled in by a rope and in the morning Bob was much better though very weak.

"I think he'll come around," remarked the professor. "I'd like a different kind of medicine for him, but perhaps we can find Mr. Seabury and his houseboat. He has quite a stock of drugs, he told me."

“We can’t get to him unless we find another outlet of the lake,” said Jerry.

“Very well, then we’ll look for one,” answered Uriah Snodgrass. “Let’s make a tour of this body of water.”

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE FLOATING FOREST

PUTTING into operation the suggestion of the professor the boys started the *Dartaway* off after breakfast on a tour of the lake. The day was cloudy and there was a stiff breeze which kicked up something of a sea, but the motor craft was able to weather heavier waves than any the boys encountered.

"There must be an outlet to account for the water flowing away," remarked the professor, as they speeded along. Bob continued to improve slightly though he was far from well. His delirium had left him, however, and he was very weak.

They traveled many miles around the shores of the lake but discovered nothing in the way of an outlet. The water seemed to be lowering rapidly.

"This is getting serious," remarked the professor as he closely scanned the surface of the lake. "We've got to do something."

"The question is — what?" said Ned.

"We had better go a little farther," continued

the scientist. "Then if we do not discover something, we'll camp for the night. In the morning we may have better luck."

It was well along in the afternoon now and Jerry, who was at the wheel, speeded up the engine to send the craft ahead faster in order to cover as much of the lake as possible. But no explanation of the phenomenon rewarded the efforts of the travelers.

"That looks like a good place to camp," said Jerry, pointing ahead to a clump of forest. The shores were of sloping gravel and the receding water has not left exposed a lot of mud. "We can't do better than to put up there," he added.

"Are we going ashore?" asked Ned.

"I think it will be wise," replied Uriah Snodgrass. "Bob is restless in the narrow bunk and he needs a change."

The sick boy had dozed off and took no part in the discussion.

The *Dartaway* was headed for the place Jerry had indicated, and in a short time the travelers were ashore with Ned and Jerry making camp and erecting the tent, while the professor looked after Bob. The boat was moored by a long rope some distance from shore as they did not want to find it aground in the morning in case the waters should

continue to recede. They could wade out to it, as the shore was sloping.

Bob did seem a little better when placed on a comfortable cot in the tent. However, he took no interest in what was going on but lay with closed eyes, for the fever still burned in his veins in spite of the medicine administered by the professor.

"I must get something stronger for Bob," he said. "If I was near a drug store I would have no trouble, but out here I'm afraid I can find nothing that will completely break the high fever. If I met our old Indian friend he might be able to suggest to me some vegetable remedy."

"We'd better make everything doubly secure to-night," remarked Jerry as they prepared to retire.

"Why?" asked Ned.

"Because there's going to be a storm, and, if I'm not much mistaken, a tough one."

Indeed it did look as though Jerry's prophecy was likely to be fulfilled. The sun had long since sunk down behind a bank of ominous looking clouds, and now a fitful wind was springing up, sighing through the palmetto trees and swaying the long streamers of vines like big pendulums. Whenever the wind died away momentarily there was a curious hush over everything, that magnified slight sounds. It grew darker but with

a peculiar yellow cast that gave objects a sickly hue.

"We're in for a heavy blow," remarked the professor. "Look well to the guy ropes, boys."

They needed no urging, but set to with a will, the scientist helping them, to make their camp secure. As the hours went by, and the signs of the storm did not increase, they had hopes that it might pass away.

Ned and the professor stretched themselves out on their cots while Jerry, who had agreed to take first watch, sat just outside the tent watching the fitful play of lightning in the western sky.

"I guess it's coming after all," he said to himself as the flashes grew more brilliant. Now and then low mutterings of thunder could be heard, and the wind, which, for the last half hour had died away, suddenly sprang up with an increased violence.

Suddenly there sounded a shrill shrieking as though some gigantic whistle had been blown. So startling was it that Jerry sprang to his feet thinking that, in some unaccountable way, a steamer had gotten on Butterfly Lake. But an instant later he knew it was the hurricane, for the force of it nearly blew the tent over.

"All hands to help hold things down!" yelled Jerry, springing to a guy rope as the canvas un-

dulated under the force of the powerful wind.

Fortunately Ned and the professor were light sleepers. They sprang up and went to Jerry's assistance. The tent seemed determined to give in to the wind and collapse, but the three held on until the first fury of the blast had passed by. It settled down to a heavy blow but the ropes held. Then with a dash of stinging globules the rain came, and the storm was fairly on. The three outside the tent were drenched in an instant, and hastened inside.

Bob had awakened from the noise of the tempest. He sat up, half frightened, but when Jerry assured him everything was safe he turned over and dozed off again, so powerful a hold did the fever have on him.

It was a night such as the travelers had seldom experienced on any of their journeys, and they had been in some tight places. There was almost a continuous rattle and roar of thunder and the lightning was incessant. Mingled with the rain was the boom of the lake waves on the shore, for the wind kicked up quite a disturbance on the large body of water.

"I hope our boat's safe," remarked Jerry as there sounded a fiercer burst of the storm.

It seemed as if morning would never come but

at last there was a preceptible lifting of the darkness and the storm seemed to abate some. Ned put on an oil-skin coat, and, donning a pair of rubber boots, ventured out. No sooner had he emerged from the tent than he gave a shout which brought the professor and Jerry to the tent flap.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Snodgrass.

"We're adrift!"

"Adrift! What do you mean? We're not on the boat!"

"No, but we're on something that's floating. Look over there at those trees on shore and you can see that we're moving!"

Jerry and the professor looked. Getting two tall trees in range they could easily note that they were moving, as the position of the trees changed with reference to themselves.

"What could have happened?" asked Jerry.

"We must have landed on an island instead of on the mainland," said Ned. "In some way the island got adrift."

"I think we landed on the main land all right," said Uriah Snodgrass, "but what happened was this: These everglades are not much more than floating masses of vegetation, several feet thick it is true, and capable of supporting large trees. But the fury of the storm probably cut off from the

main land the portion we're on. It floated off and took us with it. We're in the middle of the lake."

"Where's our boat?" asked Jerry.

"Back where you moored it, probably, unless it has also drifted with us," replied Mr. Snodgrass.

"Then we're in for a lot of trouble," exclaimed Ned. "What shall we do?"

"We'd better make some explorations," suggested the professor. "It's stopped raining. We'll try and discover how large our island is."

They looked to see that Bob was comfortable, and found him sleeping. Placing some water where he could reach it, the three set off expecting to be back in half an hour or so.

Through the woods they went, seeking to get to the other side of the floating island to look for their boat. It was hard work tramping through the underbrush, and they needed all the protection which their heavy oil-skin coats and rubber boots gave them. On and on they went, taking little heed of direction, for they were all anxious and worried.

But the island seemed very large. They had left the shores and were well into the interior. It was dark and gloomy for the sky was overcast. Suddenly the professor called:

"Boys, let's halt a minute."

Ned and Jerry stopped. They looked at their companion.

"I'm afraid we've done rather a foolish thing," he said. "Have either of you a compass?"

The boys said they had not.

"Neither have I," went on Mr. Snodgrass. "I left mine in the tent. We should have been more careful. I don't know in what direction we are going, nor which way to go back. This island is larger than I thought."

"Do you think we're lost?" asked Ned, in some alarm.

"Yes, boys, it looks very much as though we were lost in a floating forest, and I think we'll have trouble in getting back to camp."

CHAPTER XXV.

A CRY FOR HELP

WITH anxious faces the travelers looked at one another. The alarm caused by the discovery that they were on a floating island made them forget their usual caution. Even so seasoned a tourist as Uriah Snodgrass had been at fault, and he did not cease to blame himself for it.

"We'll do the best we can," he said. "This is more my fault than any one's else, as I proposed it in such a hurry."

"Can't we follow our trail back?" asked Ned.

"We can try, but I fancy we wandered over rather a crooked one."

This they found to be true. They managed to follow their tracks for some distance but soon lost the trail amid the trees and dense underbrush.

They had come off without breakfast and the pangs of hunger began to make themselves manifest. As for the professor, once the first shock of being lost had passed, he became so much interested in catching some curious bugs that he paid

little attention to the boys. However, they kept him in sight, for it would not do to become separated in this dense forest.

"If we'd only told Bob to fire a gun or do something in case we didn't return soon," remarked Ned with a sigh. "Poor Bob! I wish we were back where he is."

"No use wishing," spoke up Jerry. "We've got to keep on. Maybe we'll hit the trail soon."

On and on they wandered but only, it seemed, to get the more hopelessly lost. The two boys were much alarmed, but the scientist, his whole mind given over to collecting bugs, was somewhat indifferent.

"Hark! What was that?" cried Ned suddenly.

"Sounded like a gun," said Jerry.

"It was a gun," replied Ned. "It was over this way," and he pointed to the left. "Come on. Maybe it's a party of hunters."

Calling to the professor, the boys turned in the direction from which the report had come. They had not gone far before another gun shot was heard and they knew they were in the right direction, but toward whom they were going they did know.

"Anyway it's some person or persons," argued

Ned. "We can help them or they can help us. We'll have company if we are lost."

The gun continued to be fired at intervals and but for this the three would not have known how to proceed. The reports sound very close now and in about ten minutes the two boys and the professor saw something white glimmering before them in the light of the sun that was just breaking through the clouds.

"There's the lake! There's water! We're on the shore!" cried Jerry.

A few moments later they had emerged from the dense forest and saw before them their own tent with Bob at the entrance loading and firing his rifle.

"Good boy!" cried Ned. "How did you think to do it, old chap? How are you?"

"I was worried when I found you all gone," said the invalid. "I thought you might have gone off in the woods and, as I looked out of the tent I thought I saw the land moving. That scared me and I got up. I feared I was on a floating island so I fired the gun to call you back as I didn't know what had happened while you were away."

"You're on a floating island all right," remarked Jerry. "We got lost in the woods, look-

ing for some way out of the difficulty, and your firing gave us the right direction."

"How do you feel, Bob?" asked the professor.

"A little better, I think."

But Bob's flushed face and unnaturally bright eye did not bear out this statement.

"You had better go back to bed," decided Mr. Snodgrass. "I'll give you some more medicine. I think you are getting a touch of malaria mixed with your fever."

The exertion of getting out of bed and firing the gun had greatly weakened Bob and he was much worse. They ate a hurried breakfast, and the professor gave the patient some more medicine.

"We ought to look for our boat," said Ned. "If we lose that it's all up with us. Suppose we walk along shore. We may get a sight of it."

"Good idea," agreed Uriah Snodgrass. "I'll stay here with Bob and you and Jerry can move in opposite directions. You can't get lost if you follow the shore and the one who first sights the boat can fire three shots and they will call the other to him."

Ned and Jerry agreed that this was a good plan and started off. Ned walked quickly along the shore, keeping a watch for the *Dartaway* but the

sight of her did not reward his eyes. As he was proceeding, having tramped for over two hours, he heard a noise in the bushes just ahead of him where a little point of land jutted out into the lake.

"Some one is coming," reasoned the lad, holding his gun in readiness as he thought of the ugly negroes.

An instant later a figure came into view. Ned started as he caught sight of it. He could not see it distinctly but he observed a gun barrel. Then he had a glimpse of a red cap.

"Jerry!" he called. "Is that you?"

"That's who it is! I was just thinking I had met an Indian or a colored man. See anything of the boat?" and Jerry stepped from behind the bushes and confronted his chum.

"Not a sign. Did you?"

"No, and between us, we completed the circuit of the island. Must be about six miles around it."

"No boat," murmured Ned. "What are we going to do?"

"Land only knows. This island is still floating, and it seems to be continually moving in the same general direction — that is south. Maybe the boat is drifting also and we'll catch up to her or she will with us."

"I hope so. But we'd better go back now. I hate to take bad news to the professor, though."

There was no help for it, however, and soon the two youths were tramping back toward camp. The scientist was much disappointed that they had not been successful, but he was more worried over Bob's condition.

"I'm afraid of the result if he doesn't get different medicine soon," he said.

The day was a gloomy one in spite of the fine weather that followed the storm. The campers were in no mood for doing anything and sat about listlessly, now and then taking an observation to see how their island was behaving. It seemed to be about in the middle of the big lake, though moving slowly southward.

"It's bound to fetch up somewhere," observed Ned.

"If it doesn't strike some low place in the lake and become anchored," replied Jerry. "But I don't see that we can do anything. We might swim off when it gets near the mainland, but we'll be in a bad way without our boat."

There were uneasy sleepers in camp that night. Early in the morning Ned and Jerry were up to see if, by any chance, their boat had drifted near them.

"We'll take another tramp along shore," proposed Jerry.

Once more they started off. Jerry had gone about two miles when he heard three shots fired.

"That's the signal!" he exclaimed. "Ned must have sighted the *Dartaway!*"

He hurried back, passing through the camp and telling the professor what he believed had happened. Nor was he mistaken. He found Ned pacing up and down the shore, stripped to his underwear and ready to plunge into the lake.

"Do you see it?" called Jerry.

"Looks like her off there," and Ned pointed to a speck on the lake. "I'm going to swim out to her."

"Is it safe? There might be alligators or big snakes."

"I've got to take a chance. We can never get away from here without the boat. You watch me and if you see anything that looks dangerous — why shoot."

Ned waded out into the water until he got to his depth and then he began swimming. Jerry anxiously watched for a sight of some big reptile or saurian but his fears were groundless. In half an hour Ned had reached the floating object.

"I wonder if it's the boat?" said Jerry to himself.

His question was answered a moment later for, over the surface of the lake sounded the explosions that told that Ned had started the engine of the *Dartaway*.

In a short time the boat was close in shore. Jerry waded out to her and then, in their recovered craft, the chums headed for camp, where they found the professor much delighted at their success.

To avoid a repetition of the floating away of the boat they tied her by a long rope to a tree close to the tent. Then, in much better spirits, they sat down to plan what next to do.

"I think we'd better all get into the boat and hunt for the outlet of this lake," said Mr. Snodgrass. "There is no question but what the one leading into Lake Okeechobee is closed. There must be another or the water would not continue to fall. I believe that —"

The professor's belief was destined to remain unannounced, for at that instant there sounded a cry over the water.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Those are girls' voices!" remarked Jerry, springing to his feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PLIGHT OF THE GIRLS

ONCE more over the water sounded the cry for help. It was evident that several persons were calling and, as the boys and the professor listened, they found that the appeal came from around a point of land that jutted out into the lake from the floating island, not far from the camp.

"Get into the boat!" called Ned to Jerry, as the latter hurried down to the shore. "We'll find 'em."

The two were soon in the *Dartaway* and the engine was started. As the motor craft moved out of the little cove in front of camp the boys saw before them three girls in a boat.

"Help us!" cried the young ladies.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry.

"We've caught a big fish and it's towing the boat!"

"More likely an alligator!" exclaimed Ned. "Put a little more speed on, Jerry. Why, if they aren't Mr. Seabury's daughters! The houseboat must be near by!"

"Sure enough!" answered Jerry. "That's good news. We can get some medicine for Bob now."

Though the rowboat was moving at good speed the *Dartaway* soon caught up to it. Ned and Jerry saw three very much frightened girls who waved their hands to them as the boys approached.

"They're from the *Dartaway*!" cried Rose. "I'm so glad to see them!"

"Quick!" exclaimed Olivia. "Something has been towing us for an hour!"

"What is it?" asked Ned, as he tried to peer beneath the water.

"Oh, a terrible big fish," answered Nellie.

In a few moments the rowboat was fast to the motor craft and the smaller one came to a stop. Then there was a flurry in the water just ahead, and an ugly black snout was thrust up.

"An alligator!" exclaimed Jerry. He grabbed for his gun and sent a bullet into the saurian. A greater commotion beneath the surface of the lake, which was tinged with red, showed that the leaden missile had gone home.

"You killed him!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes, but it wasn't much of a kill," responded his chum as the alligator came to the surface, disclosing the fact that it was a small one, only about

five feet long. "Regular baby. How did you girls come to get fast to it?"

"We didn't. It got fast to us," replied Olivia. "Rose had baited a big hook on a stout line, expecting to catch a shark I guess. We laughed at her but she said she'd catch something with it."

"And I did," cried Rose. "I let it trail over the side and the first thing I knew something took my bait and hook and the boat began to move off. We were scared to death."

"How did you get here? Where is the house-boat? We left you on Lake Okeechobee," inquired Jerry.

"Isn't this Lake Okeechobee?" asked Rose in some alarm.

"We named it Butterfly Lake," said Jerry, and he told what had happened since they last visited Mr. Seabury and his daughters.

"That's queer," said Rose. "We have been cruising about on some lake, and we supposed it was Lake Okeechobee. I noticed that we went through quite a narrow place the other evening, made a short circuit and returned to it, but I thought nothing of it. We anchored the boat near the passage and we've been there ever since except to-day when we thought we'd go fishing."

"Where is this narrow place you speak of; near

the one where we were?" asked Jerry, much interested.

"No, off that way," and Rose pointed to the south. "Our houseboat is there yet. We must hurry back or father will be alarmed."

"You must have found another outlet between the two lakes," was Jerry's opinion. "That's just what we want as we can't use the one we came through, owing to the lowering of Butterfly Lake. Have you noticed that?"

"Yes," answered Olivia. "Our boat was nearly ashore. But father says these lakes frequently get low in the summer time when there is not much rain."

"We've had enough rain for the last week or so," replied Ned. "However, no harm is done if we can get back to Lake Okeechobee the way you came into this lake. We'll tow you back to the place."

The girls thought this was a good plan. They inquired after the professor and Bob, and were sorry to learn of the latter's illness.

"I'm sure father has some medicine that would make him better," said Nellie. "He has a regular drug store aboard the *Wanderer*. Did the professor get his wonderful butterfly?"

"No," replied Jerry and he related the scientist's experience with the ugly negroes.

The *Dartaway*, towing the rowboat, was headed back toward where the girls said their houseboat lay. As they passed the camp Jerry called to the professor to let him know where they were going, and promising to ask Mr. Seabury for a list of the medicines he had so that the professor might select some for Bob.

"Now you girls will have to tell us which way to steer," suggested Ned, when they had been puffing along for some distance. "How far did that alligator tow you?"

"It seemed like fifty miles," replied Rose with a laugh.

"It was about an hour," said Olivia, with more regard for correct details.

"Then we ought to be there soon," declared Jerry. "That alligator wasn't going very fast."

"There's the place!" suddenly exclaimed Nellie. "I remember it by the three dead trees on a little point of land," and she indicated where she meant.

Jerry headed the *Dartaway* in that direction. He scanned the shore, which they were approaching, for a sight of an outlet from Butterfly Lake.

As he drew nearer he could see nothing that looked like a passage.

"Are you sure this is the place?" he asked the girls.

"Positive," they all assured him, as they had all taken note of the three dead trees.

"It's strange, but I can't see any way out of the lake at this point," spoke Jerry, standing up and gazing ahead.

"I know it's the place!" insisted Nellie. "There, girls, see my handkerchief that I dropped as I was baiting my hook!"

She pointed to the piece of linen on the bank. There was no mistaking this bit of evidence. Jerry ran the boat ashore and got out. The girls followed him and Nellie recovered her handkerchief.

"This is the place we came through," she said. "The houseboat was moored right here."

"But now it's gone and the passage is closed up!" exclaimed Jerry. "Something very strange has happened."

CHAPTER XXVII

OTTIBY TO THE RESCUE

FOR a moment following Jerry's announcement the girls did not know what to say. The news startled them.

"Do you mean to tell us that the passage by which we entered here from Lake Okeechobee is closed?" asked Nellie.

"It seems to be," replied Jerry.

"And the houseboat is gone?" asked Rose.

"Where is it?" asked Ned. "You left it here and now it has disappeared!"

"Poor father!" exclaimed Olivia. "What can have happened to him?" and she looked at the startled countenances of her sisters.

The girls were very much frightened, not only at the disappearance of their houseboat but because of the strange happening that had closed the passage, and they were alarmed on account of their father.

"What shall we do?" asked Rose. "Perhaps

those wicked colored men or some Seminole Indians have captured father."

"Don't talk of such horrid things!" exclaimed Nellie. "We never should have left him alone!"

"The best thing you can do is to come to our camp," suggested Ned. "We can tell the professor what has happened and perhaps he can suggest a way out of it. Maybe the passage has become blocked by a mass of floating vegetation, or an island such as we are on."

"Are you on a floating island?" asked Olivia.

"Yes, a regular floating forest," answered Jerry. "I think you had better come with us."

There was nothing else to do, and the girls got into the motor boat while their small craft was towed by the *Dartaway*. In a short time they arrived at the camp. The professor met them at the shore. He look worried, and Ned asked:

"Is anything the matter?"

"Bob is out of his mind again," replied the scientist. "He seems much worse. Did you bring a list of medicines? I find I shall need several kinds."

"The houseboat is gone," said Jerry.

"Gone?" and the professor's face looked blank.

"And poor, dear papa is gone with her," put in Rose.

Jerry quickly explained what had happened and Ned spoke of his theory.

"I believe you're right," agreed Uriah Snodgrass. "We are in strange waters and things have happened that I never would dream of. But, girls, don't worry. I'm sure your father is all right. I wish I could find him, as I am worried about Bob, and I'm sure he would have the very medicine I need to make the boy well."

"Let me assist in nursing him," said Olivia. "It will help to take my mind off our troubles."

"We'll aid you," added Rose and Nellie, and the three young ladies went into the tent where Bob was tossing in the delirium of fever. The professor was glad enough of their help and they at once bathed Bob's head, face and arms in witch hazel which gave him some relief. They also kept wet cloths on his brow to reduce the fever.

"Now, boys, we've got a serious problem ahead of us," said Mr. Snodgrass as he beckoned Ned and Jerry to follow him out of earshot of the tent. "It seems that we are caught in a sort of trap. We're on a lake from which there appears to be no outlet, and it is constantly falling. In a

little while there'll be no water in it and if we want to get back home we'll have to walk."

"But there must be an outlet or how does the water get out?" asked Ned.

"I'm afraid the outlet is one that we can't use," replied the scientist. "I mean an underground one."

"What's to be done?" inquired Jerry.

"I have thought of a plan," Uriah Snodgrass continued, "but it is going to be difficult for we have no tools for working."

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"We might cut a channel through the obstruction that is blocking the passage through which the girls came."

"Or we might haul the boat overland," added Ned.

"Providing the floating island which blocks the passage is not too great in extent," put in Jerry.

This was a new phase of the matter. Clearly they could not dig a canal of any great length, with the primitive tools at their command. Nor could they haul the *Dartaway* overland any long distance.

"It looks as if we were up against it," said Jerry with a doleful sigh. "We'll have to think of another plan."

At that moment there was a cry from the tent and the professor hurried to it, to find that Bob was struggling to leave his cot because of a fever delusion that there was a big snake near him. The girls were frightened and it required all Mr. Snodgrass's strength to hold Bob down until the spell passed. After that Ned, Jerry or the professor remained on duty with one of the girls, caring for the patient.

The camp was anything but a cheerful place. The girls wore anxious looks, and the two boys, in spite of their past experience in getting out of serious difficulties, had lost some of their good spirits. The professor did not give way to gloomy thoughts, but it was clear that he was worried.

In this way two days passed. Ned and Jerry took turns in cruising about in the *Dartaway*, looking for some means of egress from the lake, but none was to be seen. It was at the close of the second day that Jerry, returning in the motor boat, saw a small craft approaching their island, which was still drifting slowly.

"It's a canoe," he said, as he made the *Dartaway* fast and waded ashore to camp. "I hope it doesn't contain an advance guard of ugly negroes or Indians."

Thinking it best to be on the safe side, Jerry quietly summoned the professor and Ned. They got their guns and waited on shore. The canoe continued to approach. The three girls were in the tent with Bob.

"There are two men in it," said Jerry.

"Then I guess we can take care of them," remarked the professor.

"If there aren't a lot more to follow," added Ned.

On came the canoe. The two paddlers sent it forward at a swift pace.

"They're Indians," observed Jerry a little later. "One of 'em looks just like Ottiby."

"It is Ottiby!" exclaimed the professor.

This was confirmed a few minutes later, when the Seminole chief stepped ashore, followed by another bronze-skinned individual.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Glad to see. This my son, Skamore."

"We're glad to see you," replied the professor. "We're in a bad fix and perhaps you can help us, as you know a lot about these queer lakes."

"Me help. Yo' 'help Ottiby, Ottiby help yo'," and with that the Indian squatted down and began to smoke a pipe, which example his son followed.

Waiting until the red-men had recovered from

the exertion of their paddling, the professor told them of the plight of the party, and also of Bob's illness. He asked if Ottiby did not know of something that was good for fevers. The chief grunted and spoke to his son who, without a word, glided off into the woods.

Then Ottiby began to talk. He said his son would search for a certain plant that the Indians used when they had fevers. As for the blocking of the passage, that was another matter. Ottiby said he and his son had come to the lake to fish. He knew of no outlet from it other than the two already described. One was impassable as it was blocked by the falling of the water and the other was closed by a mass of land — a veritable floating island. The Indian said he had reached the lake by an overland route; he and his son carrying their canoe.

"But me help yo'," finished the Indian. "We go look at place in mornin',"

Hardly had he spoken than his son came hurrying back through the bushes. His hands were empty, showing that his search for the plant had been unsuccessful. But there was a queer look on his face. He spoke some words to his father, at which the old chief started.

"What is the matter?" asked the professor.

"Hurricane coming," was the answer. "Look out, or all blow 'way."

As he spoke there sounded a deep moaning sound through the trees of the floating forest.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE HURRICANE

THE words of the Seminole chief's son were startling enough, and, coupled as they were with the strange sound of the wind, alarmed the boys and the professor.

"What's the matter?" asked Rose, coming to the tent flap as she heard the commotion outside. It was the first time the girls were made aware of the presence of the Indians. The professor explained, asking the young ladies to remain cool as the danger might not be as great as they feared.

"Oh! What will become of papa?" cried Nellie. "His houseboat may be wrecked!"

"Maybe the chief knows something of the *Wanderer*," suggested Olivia to Mr. Snodgrass. "Ask him, please,"

To the surprise of all the Indian chief said he had seen the houseboat on Lake Okeechobee on his way to Butterfly Lake. He described the location and this showed it had moved away from the blocked passage. Ottiby had not tried to

enter Butterfly Lake through that waterway and so, was not aware that it was choked up.

"He has seen father's boat!" exclaimed Nellie. "Was he all right?"

"Him walk back and forth on deck quick," replied the Indian with a smile.

Never had the boys seen such a disturbance of the elements. The rain came down in sheets and the tent, made of double canvas as it was, leaked like a sieve. There was such power to the wind that, had the tent not been protected by the surrounding forest, it would have been blown over.

The girls were very much frightened, and cowered down in a corner under such coverings as they could secure to keep the rain from leaking in on them. Bob was protected with his chums' rain-coats and, throughout the hurricane, kept murmuring in his delirium about pleasant sunshiny days.

At last the storm reached its height. The tent seemed fairly to lift loose from the guy ropes, but they were strong and well fastened, and the fury of the wind was cheated. The thunder appeared to gather all its powers for a tremendous clap, following such a stroke of lightning that it seemed as if the whole heavens were a mass of flame. Then with an increase in the fall of rain, which lasted for ten minutes and completed the drench-

ing of everyone in the tent, the tropical outburst was over.

Lanterns which had blown out were relighted and the flaps of the canvas house opened. Ned and Jerry hurried out to wring some of the water from their clothes, while the professor sent them to the motor boat, which had been covered with a heavy tarpaulin, for some dry clothes for Bob. The lightning still flickered behind a mass of clouds in the east and brought out in sharp outline the tops of the trees on the distant mainland. Jerry looked at them for a moment. Then he called out:

“Our island’s floating away faster than before!”

It needed but a glance to show this. Because of the fury of the hurricane the floating forest had been torn loose from the temporary anchorage on the bottom of the lake and was being swept along like a boat.

“I wish it would take us somewhere so’s we could get off this lake,” remarked Bob, as he pulled the *Dartaway* in and proceeded to get the clothes from the lockers.

In the morning they found themselves several miles from where they had been the night before. The day was a fine one after the storm, and the

girls forgot their fright and the discomforts of wet clothes.

"Look!" cried Rose suddenly, pointing ahead. "There are the three dead trees that marked where we left the houseboat."

"So they are," added Olivia. "Maybe this island will float over there and we can see if the houseboat is waiting for us."

"But you forget the blocked passage," said Nellie.

The island, on which the party was, continued to move slower and slower as the wind died out. Jerry, who was aiding Ned in the task of getting breakfast, went down to the shore of the floating island for a pail of water. He saw the three dead trees, and noted the girls looking at them and talking about what has happened since they went fishing. He also saw something else.

What it was caused him to drop his pail and set up a shout. The professor and Ned, followed by Ottiby and his son, came running up to him.

"What is it?" asked Ned.

"The passage!" cried Jerry. "See, it is clear now. The hurricane must have blown the mass of trees and vegetation away and we can get into Lake Okeechobee now!"

"Then we can get back to papa on the house-

boat!" exclaimed Olivia. "Oh, girls, isn't it fine! The very storm we were so afraid of has done us a favor!"

"I'll make sure of it," Jerry went on, as he and Ned got into the *Dartaway*. The girls insisted on going also, and soon the five were puffing toward where could be seen a narrow stream leading from Butterfly Lake. In a short time they were up to it and Jerry's surmise was found to be correct. The hurricane had blown the small floating island clear through the passage into Lake Okeechobee and that big body of water was now accessible from Butterfly Lake.

"There's the *Wanderer*!" exclaimed Olivia, pointing ahead, and the others, looking, saw the houseboat moored at the entrance to the passage. They also saw Mr. Seabury pacing the upper deck. At the sight of the motor boat he waved his hands and set up a shout of welcome.

"Father! Father! Here we are!" cried Nellie as Jerry sent the *Dartaway* straight for the *Wanderer*.

CHAPTER XXIX

NODDY'S DANGER

THEY were all on board a few minutes later. Mr. Seabury did his best to hug his three daughters at once and shake hands with Ned and Jerry. As for the talk — well, it would have taken half a dozen phonographs of extra power to register all that was said in a short time.

“There isn’t so much to tell,” said Mr. Seabury. “When you girls went out in the boat, leaving the *Wanderer* about where she is moored now I was dozing on deck. Pretty soon Ponto called my attention to a swarm of butterflies some distance away. I had in mind the professor and his search and I thought I might find just what he wanted.

“We went after them, but they gave us quite a chase, and when we thought we had them the whole lot flew inland and we lost sight of them. Then, when we came back where we had been moored, near the passage, we found it was gone.

I was never so surprised in my life and I thought I had made a mistake. I didn't know what to do and Ponto was so frightened he was of no service. Then my old rheumatic trouble came back with a rush and I had to take to bed. But when the storm ceased I got better. I found the boat had dragged her anchor, so I had Ponto start the motor this morning and put us back as near as possible to where the passage had been. To my surprise it was open again. That's all there is to it. I don't care what happened as long as I have you girls back."

"Nor we as long as we have you," said Olivia, with another hugging in which her sisters joined her.

The boys and Mr. Seabury discussed what had happened and came to the conclusion that all around the two lakes, as well as in them, must be large masses of floating vegetation in the form of islands which drifted here and there. The falling of Butterfly Lake would have affected Lake Okeechobee by drawing water from it through the second passage had not the small island acted as a dam. When the passage was opened by the hurricane blowing the island out of the way, there would have been a strong current from Lake Okeechobee into the other body of water but for

the fact that the smaller lake suddenly ceased falling.

The boys learned later, from Chief Ottiby, that Butterfly Lake was a strange one and frequently fell as the water flowed off through some unknown opening. Then it would as suddenly cease, and regain its former level. This was now taking place, and the water was again rising.

"Well, you boys certainly have had some queer experiences since coming here," remarked Mr. Seabury when all that had happened in the last few days had been told. "I have been wondering what you came to Florida for."

"We came for several reasons," said Jerry. "The professor wanted to get his rare butterfly, but he hasn't got it yet. We boys wanted some adventures and we also had a message to deliver to an acquaintance."

"Yes, and we forgot to deliver it," put in Ned.

"We will later, however," resumed Jerry. "Also I was going to look up some land my mother owns somewhere down here."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know exactly, but I suppose the deed tells." Later the widow's son showed Mr. Seabury the document.

"So your mother thinks this land is valueless, eh?" asked the owner of the *Wanderer*.

"She always said she wished she had back the money she paid for it."

"Well, she's likely to get it," went on Mr. Seabury.

"Where is it?"

"Just outside of Kissimmee City. I happen to own a hotel there and this land is next to it. For several years I have tried to get in communication with the owner but was not successful. Now I do so by accident."

"Why did you want to find the owner?"

"Because I want to buy the land. I intend to build an addition to my hotel, as the place where it is located has become quite a summer colony. I will give your mother a good price for the lot. Do you think she will sell it?"

"I'm sure she will. In fact I think I'm safe in offering it to you at a fair price. I don't know what it is worth, but I'm willing to leave it to you."

"No, I don't do business that way. When you get to Kissimmee City, you can telegraph your mother about the land. You can have it valued by some real estate dealer, and I'll pay you whatever

he says it is worth. Is that satisfactory?" And Jerry said it was.

"We mustn't forget Bob!" exclaimed Ned, after this business was concluded. "The professor wants to know what kinds of medicine you have, Mr. Seabury. Bob has a bad fever."

"I have several kinds. I'll take some of them with me and go to your camp."

In a short time Mr. Seabury, with Ned and Jerry, was in the motor boat speeding toward the camp. The three girls were left on the *Wanderer*.

The professor was glad to see Mr. Seabury, and the two men discussed Bob's case. The youth was still in the stupor of the high fever, and Mr. Seabury looked grave as he examined him. However, he administered some strong medicine.

Whether the fever had run its course, or whether the medicine Mr. Seabury gave him was responsible, was not determined, but it was certain by evening Bob was much better. He continued to improve, and by the next day the fever had entirely left him. Yet he was far from strong.

As the climate of Lake Okeechobee was not doing Mr. Seabury any good he determined to proceed back north. He left a supply of medicines for Bob and, expressing the hope that the pro-

fessor would be successful in his search for the rare butterfly, prepared to start the *Wanderer* on her homeward trip. He agreed to meet Jerry in Kissimmee City in three weeks and complete the land sale in case Mrs. Hopkins agreed to it.

There was a little feeling of sadness when the three boys bade the three girls good-bye, for they had grown to be very good friends. They expressed the hope that they would meet again soon, and then, with three toots of her whistle, which were answered from the motor boat, the *Wanderer* puffed up Lake Okeechobee.

The boys and the professor decided to remain in camp another week to allow Bob to recover fully. At the end of that time they started back up north, following the shores of Lake Okeechobee, for Mr. Snodgrass was anxious about getting the rare butterfly. Chief Ottiby and his son remained on the other lake, as they wanted to do some fishing.

The *Dartaway* was not sent along at a very fast speed, as the professor wanted time to scan the shores in his search for insects. He began to fear he must return north without the butterfly which meant so much to him, and the boys, appreciating his feelings, redoubled their watchfulness in the hope of discovering the creature.

"This looks like a good place for butterflies," said Mr. Snodgrass one afternoon, pointing to a little cove which was bordered with woodland on the edge of a swamp. "Suppose we camp here for a few days?"

The boys were willing, and the boat was headed toward shore. There was a long strip of firm land before the swamp was reached and on this the tent was erected. Then, while the professor, with long rubber boots on, went into the morass to look for the butterfly the boys walked in another direction.

They had not gone very far when Jerry, who was in the lead, called out:

"Somebody else is camping here."

"Why?" asked Bob, who had fully recovered from his illness.

"There's a tent."

"Can't be much of a party in that," observed Ned. "It's only about big enough for one."

"Yes, and I guess there's the 'one,'" observed Bob, pointing to where a solitary figure stood on a little hummock near the edge of the swamp. Jerry took one look at the figure and uttered an exclamation.

"Boys! If that isn't Noddy Nixon I'm a Dutchman!"

"Noddy Nixon?" repeated Bob.

"It sure is," added Ned. "But look there! An alligator is right behind him!"

"And he doesn't see it!" cried Jerry.

It was true enough. Noddy was standing with his back to the saurian. He seemed to be gazing off into the swamp as if looking for some one.

"Hurry up and put a bullet into it!" yelled Bob, for Jerry had brought his gun along.

"We haven't time! Let's yell to Noddy to jump out of the way of it's tail!" suggested Ned. "Now all together!"

They united their voices in a shout of warning but Noddy never turned.

"He must be deaf!" exclaimed Jerry. "I'll have to try a shot, but it's pretty long."

There was nothing else to do. He raised the rifle and fired. The alligator gave a spring into the air and Noddy wheeled around.

"He heard that!" cried Ned, springing forward. The alligator was evidently mortally wounded. Noddy gave one look at the leaping, writhing saurian almost at his feet. Then he looked at the three chums who were running toward him. An instant later he had disappeared into the swamp-forest.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BUTTERFLIES — CONCLUSION

“WELL of all the queer actions!” exclaimed Jerry as he reached the spot where the alligator was stretched out dead. “I think Noddy must be crazy!”

They discussed the matter at some length and decided they had better tell the professor about it. They found the scientist tired out with his long and unsuccessful search for the rare butterfly.

“Maybe Noddy’s troubles have sent him temporarily out of his mind,” said Mr. Snodgrass. “I think it is our duty to do what we can for him, even if he has, in the past, acted as the enemy of you boys. We’ll go see him in the morning.”

They started off early the next day for Noddy’s camp. As they approached they saw the youth standing in the same place he had occupied the previous day.

“Hey, Noddy!” called Jerry when still some distance away from him.

“The wind is blowing the wrong way. He

can't hear you," remarked Mr. Snodgrass. "Try again."

"Noddy!" called Jerry. Still Noddy did not turn his head. Then all three boys united in a chorus of shouts. The Cresville bully gave no indication of having heard them.

"He's deaf!" exclaimed the professor, and this view of the matter was confirmed a moment later when Ned, having touched Noddy on the shoulder, was confronted by a very much surprised youth. Jerry, Bob and Mr. Snodgrass joined Ned at Noddy's side. The latter looking in wonderment from one to the other, took out a piece of paper and a pencil and, handing them to Jerry, said:

"I am totally deaf. I ate some queer kind of red berries and I've lost my hearing. You'll have to write out your questions for me."

"What are you doing here?" wrote Jerry.

"I'm camping here until I have that dispute over the cocoanut grove settled," Noddy replied with something of his old manner. "I've got a colored man staying with me. When I found I was deaf I sent him off to the village for some medicine. He hasn't come back and I guess he ran away with my money. I was watching for him to come on a path through the swamp yester-

day when that alligator got after me. I couldn't hear you when you yelled at me, but I felt the ground tremble when the alligator threshed around after you shot it. I was so frightened that I ran away."

The professor, who was impressed by Noddy's plight, urged him to accompany the boys back north. The three chums were willing to let by-gones be by-gones, and aid their former enemy, who was glad enough to accept help. His money was all gone and his food supplies running low. What he would have done had not the boys discovered him would be hard to say.

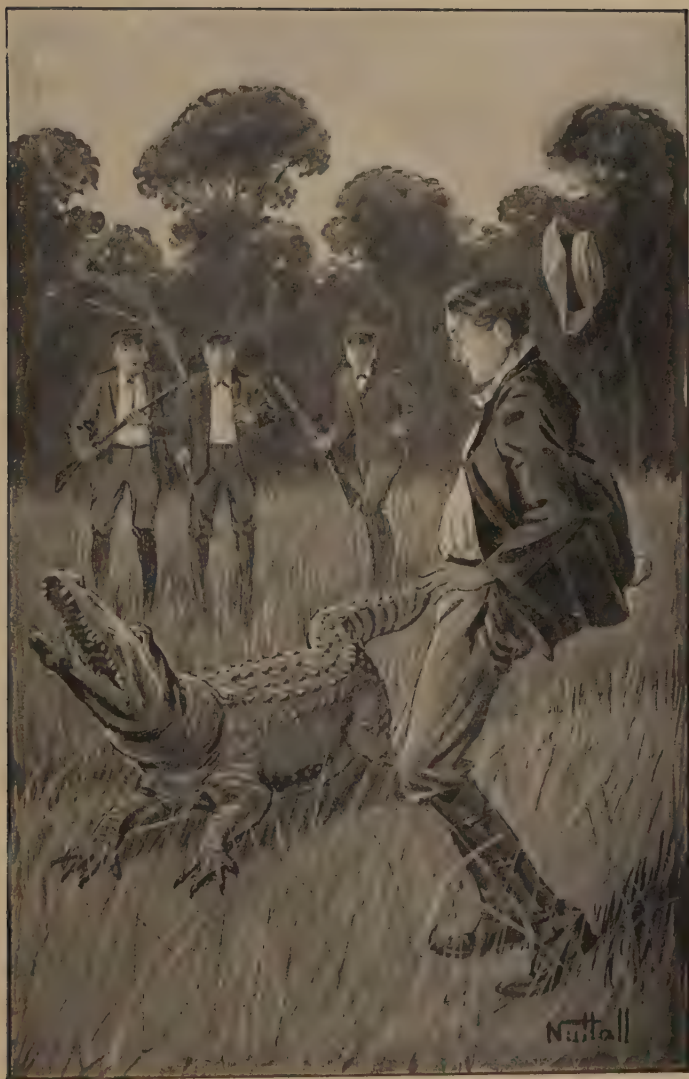
Noddy's tent was taken down and he was brought to the other camp. There, made miserable by his deafness and his failure to secure a cocoanut grove, he sat apart, refusing to talk.

That evening, when the three chums were beginning to wonder if Mr. Snodgrass had not become lost in the swamp, they heard a shouting along the path that led through the morass.

"That sounds like him," said Bob.

"It is!" exclaimed Ned a moment later as the professor came into view. He was fairly leaping up and down, holding something in his hands.

"Did a snake bite you?" inquired Jerry anxiously.



NOODY GAVE ONE LOOK AT THE WRITHING SAURIAN

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"No! I've got three of the butterflies! I caught them in the swamp a few minutes ago!" cried the delighted professor, and, hurrying up to the boys he showed in a little glass-sided box, the beautiful insects. The bodies were pink, while the large wings were of mingled blue and gold.

"I've got them!" repeated Mr. Snodgrass. "They were feeding on some beautiful flowers and first I thought they were blossoms, but their wings moved and I put the net over them. Now I'll get the reward and a commission to travel all over the world for the museum. Oh, boys! This has been a most delightful trip!"

"With certain parts left out," murmured Jerry, and Bob agreed with him.

"We'll start back to-morrow," went on the scientist. "I want to get these butterflies to the museum as soon as possible."

They broke camp the next morning. Noddy, sullen and unhappy, accompanied them. Now that his mind was at peace from having secured his prize, the professor began to study Noddy's case. He learned what the red berries were, and by looking in some of his scientific books discovered a remedy. This he administered the unfortunate youth who, in a few days, had his hearing completely restored.

"We'd better give him the message now," said Jerry one afternoon, and, as communication was now easier Noddy was told of being wanted as a witness in the lighthouse matter. He said nothing on hearing this, but showed by his manner that he was alarmed.

"I don't believe he'll answer that summons," ventured Jerry, and he was right. The next morning Noddy's bunk in the *Dartaway* was vacant. He had slipped away in the night. However, the chums did not worry about him as they were near Kissimmee City and they thought Noddy could take care of himself, now that his hearing was restored.

Mr. Seabury was found at the hotel adjoining the land Jerry's mother owned. In response to a telegram from her son, Mrs. Hopkins authorized him to sell the land to Mr. Seabury, and it was disposed of for a goodly sum.

"You must stay at my hotel for a week or so," said the gentleman to the boys. To this they agreed. Uriah Snodgrass, however, took the first train he could get for the north.

"Where are you going next?" asked Rose, of Jerry one day.

"We haven't made up our minds," answered Jerry. "Where are you going?"

"We three girls are probably going with papa to California. He thinks the climate there may do him good."

"I'd like to go to California myself," put in Ned.

"Yes, and sail on the Pacific," added Bob.

"Say, that would be fine, eh?" he cried.

"We'd like to meet you out there," said Nellie.

"It would be glorious!" cried Jerry. And how they did meet, and what strange adventures befell all, will be told in another volume, which I shall call, "The Motor Boys on the Pacific; Or, The Young Derelict Hunters," It was an outing that none of them ever forgot.

"Well, there's nothing to keep us down south any longer, I guess," remarked Jerry one morning. "What do you say that we start back north? The professor has gone on with his butterflies, I've sold mother's land, and we did Noddy a good turn."

"Not to mention that we had more adventures than we counted on," said Bob.

"And met some nice girls," added Ned, with a sigh, for Ned had rather a soft spot in his heart for all young ladies.

"Then let's arrange to go home," urged Jerry, and they did.

So here, for a time, we will take leave of the motor boys. That they were destined to take part in many more incidents seems very probable, for they were boys who did not hesitate to undertake anything that offered a spice of novelty, nor were they deterred by a little flavoring of danger.

THE END.

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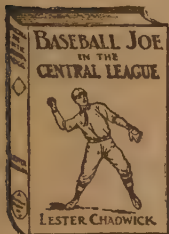
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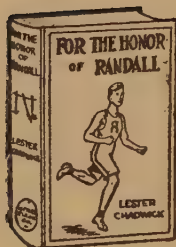
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